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The Bloody Tragedy

I went through hell on earth to its entire breadth. During the First World War, I marched over fields with corpses and bathed in a sea of mortal hunger, pain and human suffering. But all this pales by comparison to what is called a "pogrom", the terror of terrors - Man in his murderous frenzy and cruelty. As if by the sweep of a demonic hand, all laws of human coexistence are erased. Man is transformed into a bloodthirsty beast and spares no one - no elder, woman or child. He destroys, stabs, murders [and] robs, reverting into a barbarian as thousands of years ago.

The sanguinary Nero has remained a symbol of horror from ancient times. In order to reinforce his rule, he wished to silence the collective anger, hunger, suffering and fury of slaves and subjects with the blood and killing of the weak and helpless. His spirit finds no rest. It dashes from one place to another and, once, his bloody wrath fell upon our Częstochowa.

This is what happened:

[It was] in the month of May of 1919, with the blossoming of spring. The creative Force of Nature had artistically decorated the fields, parks, gardens and yards with greenery and with flowers. The branches of the two rows of trees on the Second Aleja had grown out, blossomed and become intertwined from both sides, as if making a processional way for spring.

Those were hard times, there was nothing to eat. Hunger gnawed at the poor. Men's hands lacked work. Children wept and cried for bread! The despondent father and mother roamed about and silenced their pangs with the bitter drops which they were able to come by from somewhere.

In Poland's *Kresy* [the Eastern Borderlands], a war was blazing over Poland's historical boundaries. Debauched men dominated the streets, outcasts from all around the globe in different military uniforms, rampaging freely and wantonly. They beat Jews and cut off their beards. Depravity grew, the Human disappeared and the Beast prevailed.

The antisemitic newspapers incited with "*Jews Shoot Polish Soldiers from their Hiding Places*", "*Jews Spy for the Enemy*". Anger, rage and murder-lust accumulated in embittered and despondent hearts.

Suddenly, one day, we found ourselves in a desolate, savage wilderness. A group of street-pavers hurled themselves at the Jewish barber-surgeon Nasanowicz, who was being accompanied by a soldier to treat another soldier who was wounded. They hacked him apart with their crow-bars and spades. Then it all began. Like a wild animal that had tasted blood, the masses of civilians and soldiers let themselves loose in the poor Jewish streets. They dragged the *shoichet* Reb Nechemie Gotlib out of the abattoir and split his skull with clubs and staffs. They slew the baker's apprentice next to his bakery, stabbed the broker Herszel Działoszyński at his aged mother's doorstep, to whom he had run to protect. They speared him with a military bayonet before his mother's eyes - her young, only son. They broke windows [and] doors, tore up pillows and mattresses from the houses of the poor in the street and robbed, rampaged, cursed and yelled, "*Beat, kill! Poland's traitors - the Jews!*"

Night came. A bleak desolation and complete darkness descended upon the poor Jewish streets. No one lit any lights at home. It was as if the little houses crouched, clinging to each other, like a defenceless flock of sheep attacked by sanguinary wolves. The old, eternal misery had strengthened its grip.

The following day, they celebrated their Feast of the Ascension. En masse - among them being the antisemitic instigators and the murderers - they kneeled before the icon of the Holy Mother, the Protector of Poland and Mother of the Crucified [One], the symbol of love and mercy for mankind. The sun was shining. Young couples promenaded along on the pavement and in the parks, rejoicing in their youth and love.

For us, it was as the Ninth of Av [Day of Mourning]. We were all mourners, none washed their faces. A dreary grief lay on all Jewish faces and hearts, for there, at the morgue in the Jewish Hospital, five Jews lay, old and young, with broken skulls, brains bashed out, eyes gouged [and] bloodied hearts, as a testimony to the shame and woe of men.

On the morrow - the third day - all the city's Jews, men and women, gathered in front of the Jewish Hospital, with heads cast down and bitter hearts, and awaited the funeral. Grandfathers and children, black-haired and grey heads, came all together. Two rows of young men stood by the gates, clapping their hands to make way for the funerary procession.

The Hospital gates were opened and a black, dark train of coffins appeared. Religious Jews with long caftans carried their *shoichet*. Middle-aged Jews, wearing hats, carried their barber. Jewish merchants of varying apparel carried their broker. Young bakers' apprentices carried their bakery-worker and very young labourers carried their friend.



***The five victims of the pogrom of 20th May 1919
Mojsze Nisanowicz, Mojsze Brokman, Zvi Hersz Działoszyński, Anczel Cymerman and the shoichet Reb Nechemie Gotlib
May God avenge their blood!***

Suddenly, a wail of bereavement arose from the colossal multitude, like a raging sea, which shook the air and reached the heavens. Thus the impoverished masses from the Jewish quarter raised a cry to Heaven with the painful question, "*Why?*" Why were their lives so hard and their deaths so gruesome? They had suffered hard, hungry war-years of epidemics and the deaths of their children. They had hoped and waited for the War to end, that the hunger may no longer gnaw at their bodies and the epidemics no longer consume their little ones. How they had waited for that "Bright Day" of Poland's liberation! Oh God, Oh Heaven - for what and for when [had they waited]??

Black clouds spread over the sky, as if it were wishing to hide its face so as not to see the sorrow and pain of mankind on earth.

Then, the black procession proceeded towards the cemetery. From both sides of the road, green meadows and fields of ripening sheaves stretched forth. But, today, they were veiled in black, the same as the hearts of the people in the funeral procession, as if they wished to accompany the dark funeral. The company, with the five coffins, entered the cemetery and circled the five combined graves and, with trembling voices, cried out to the dead ones to not remain silent in Heaven and to not allow their disgraceful tragedy to be silenced.

Only the deceased shall continue to lay peacefully in their graves. The living find no repose at all. An agonising pain wraps itself, like a venomous serpent, around the heart and will not turn cold or be silenced!