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The Kingdom of Acre and the Later Crusades
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CHAPTER II

THE SUMMING-UP

'He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.' ECCLESIASTES I, 18

The Crusades were launched to save Eastern Christendom from the Moslems. When they ended the whole of Eastern Christendom was under Moslem rule. When Pope Urban preached his great sermon at Clermont the Turks seemed about to threaten the Bosphorus. When Pope Pius II preached the last Crusade the Turks were crossing the Danube. Of the last fruits of the movement, Rhodes fell to the Turks in 1523, and Cyprus, ruined by its wars with Egypt and Genoa and annexed at last by Venice, passed to them in 1570. All that was left to the conquerors from the West was a handful of Greek islands that Venice continued precariously to hold. The Turkish advance was checked not by any concerted effort of Christendom but by the action of the states most nearly concerned, Venice and the Hapsburg Empire, with France, the old protagonist in the Holy War, persistently supporting the infidel. The Ottoman Empire began to decline through its own failure to maintain an efficient government for its great possessions, till it could no longer oppose the ambition of its neighbours nor crush the nationalist spirit of its Christian subjects, preserved by those Churches whose independence the Crusaders had tried so hard to destroy.

Seen in the perspective of history the whole Crusading movement was a vast fiasco. The almost miraculous success of the First Crusade set up Frankish states in Outremer; and a century later, when all seemed lost, the gallant effort of the Third Crusade preserved them for another hundred years. But the tenuous kingdom of Jerusalem and its sister principalities were a puny outcome from so much energy and enthusiasm. For three centuries there was

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hardly a potentate in Europe who did not at some time vow with fervour to go on the Holy War. There was not a country that failed to send soldiers to fight for Christendom in the East. Jerusalem was in the mind of every man and woman. Yet the efforts to hold or to recapture the Holy City were peculiarly capricious and inept. Nor did these efforts have the effect on the general history of the Western Europeans that might have been expected from them. The era of the Crusades is one of the most important in the history of Western civilization. When it began, western Europe was only just emerging from the long period of barbarian invasions that we call the Dark Ages. When it ended, that great burgeoning that we call the Renaissance had just begun. But we cannot assign any direct part in this development to the Crusaders themselves. The Crusades had nothing to do with the new security in the West, which enabled merchants and scholars to travel as they pleased. There was already access to the stored-up learning of the Moslem world through Spain; students, such as Gerbert of Aurillac, had already visited the Spanish centres of education. Throughout the Crusading period itself, it was Sicily rather than the lands of Outremer that provided a meeting-place for Arab, Greek and Western culture. Intellectually, Outremer added next to nothing.¹ It was possible for a man of the calibre of Saint Louis to spend several years there without the slightest effect on his cultural outlook. If the Emperor Frederick II took an interest in Oriental civilization, that was due to his upbringing in Sicily. Nor did Outremer contribute to the progress of Western art, except in the realm of military architecture and, perhaps, in the introduction of the pointed arch. In the art of warfare, apart from castle-building, the West showed again and again that it learned nothing from the Crusades. The same mistakes were made by every expedition from the First Crusade to the Crusade of Nicopolis. The circumstances of warfare in the East differed so greatly from those in Western Europe that it was only the knights resident in Outremer who troubled to remember past experience.

¹ For the intellectual life of Outremer, see below, Appendix II.

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It is possible that the general standard of living in the West was raised by the desire of returning soldiers and pilgrims to copy the comforts of Outremer in their homelands. But the commerce between east and west, though it was increased by the Crusades, did not depend on them for its existence.

It was only in some aspects of the political development of western Europe that the Crusades left a mark. One of Pope Urban's expressed aims in preaching the Crusades was to find some useful work for the turbulent and bellicose barons who otherwise spent their energy on civil wars at home; and the removal of large sections of that unruly element to the East undoubtedly helped the rise of monarchical power in the West, to the ultimate detriment of the Papacy. But meanwhile the Papacy itself benefited. The Pope had launched the Crusade as an international Christian movement under his leadership; and its initial success greatly enhanced his power and prestige. The Crusaders all belonged to his flock. Their conquests were his conquests. As, one by one, the ancient Patriarchates of Antioch, Jerusalem and Constantinople fell under his dominion, it seemed that his claim to be the Head of Christendom was justified. In Church affairs his dominion was vastly extended. Congregations in every part of the Christian world acknowledged his spiritual supremacy. His missionaries travelled as far afield as Ethiopia and China. The whole movement stimulated the organization of the Papal Chancery on a far more international basis than before, and it played a great part in the development of Canon Law.¹ Had the Popes been content to reap ecclesiastical benefits alone, they would have had good cause for self-congratulation. But the times were not yet ready for a clear division between ecclesiastical and lay politics; and in lay politics the Papacy overreached itself. The Crusade commanded respect only when it was directed against the infidel. The Fourth Crusade, directed, if not preached, against the Christians of the East, was followed by a Crusade against the heretics of southern France and the nobles that showed them sympathy; and this was succeeded

¹ See Ullmann, *Medieval Papalism*, pp. 120-1, 128-9.

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by Crusades preached against the Hohenstaufen; till at last the Crusade came to mean any war against the enemies of Papal policy, and all the spiritual paraphernalia of indulgences and heavenly rewards was used to support the lay ambitions of the Papal See. The triumph of the Popes in ruining the Emperors both of the East and of the West led them on into the humiliations of the Sicilian war and the captivity at Avignon. The Holy War was warped to become a tragic farce.

Apart from the widening of the spiritual dominion of Rome, the chief benefit obtained by Western Christendom from the Crusades was negative. When they began the main seats of civilization were in the East, at Constantinople and at Cairo. When they ended, civilization had moved its headquarters to Italy and the young countries of the West. The Crusades were not the only cause for the decline of the Moslem world. The invasions of the Turks had already undermined the Abbasid Caliphate of Baghdad and even without the Crusade they might have ultimately brought down the Fatimid Caliphate of Egypt. But had it not been for the incessant irritation of the wars against the Franks, the Turks might well have been integrated into the Arab world and provided for it a new vitality and strength without destroying its basic unity. The Mongol invasions were more destructive still to Arab civilization, and their coming cannot be blamed on the Crusades. But had it not been for the Crusades the Arabs would have been far better able to meet the Mongol aggression. The intrusive Frankish State was a festering sore that the Moslems could never forget. So long as it distracted them they could never wholly concentrate on other problems.

But the real harm done to Islam by the Crusades was subtler. The Islamic State was a theocracy whose political welfare depended on the Caliphate, the line of priest-kings to whom custom had given a hereditary succession. The Crusading attack came when the Abbasid Caliphate was unable politically or geographically to lead Islam against it; and the Fatimid Caliphs, as heretics, could not command a wide enough allegiance. The leaders who

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arose to defeat the Christians, men like Nur ed-Din and Saladin, were heroic figures who were given respect and devotion, but they were adventurers. The Ayubites, for all their ability, could never be accepted as the supreme rulers of Islam, because they were not Caliphs; they were not even descended from the Prophet. They had no proper place in the theocracy of Islam. The Mongol destruction of Baghdad in some way eased the Moslem task. The Mameluks were able to found a durable state in Egypt because there was no longer a lawful Caliphate in Baghdad, but only a shadowy and spurious line that was kept in honourable confinement in Cairo. The Ottoman Sultans eventually solved the problem by assuming the Caliphate themselves. Their immense power made the Moslem world accept them, but never wholeheartedly; for they too were usurpers and not of the prophet's line. Christianity allowed from the outset a distinction between the things that are Caesar's and the things that are God's; and so, when the medieval conception of the undivided political City of God broke down, its vitality was unimpaired. But Islam was conceived as a political and religious unity. This unity had been cracked before the Crusades; but the events of those centuries made the cracks too wide to be mended. The great Ottoman Sultans achieved a superficial repair, but only for a time. The cracks have endured to this day.

Even more harmful was the effect of the Holy War on the spirit of Islam. Any religion that is based on an exclusive Revelation is bound to show some contempt for the unbeliever. But Islam was not intolerant in its early days. Mahomet himself considered that Jews and Christians had received a partial Revelation and were therefore not to be persecuted. Under the early Caliphs the Christians played an honourable part in Arab society. A remarkably large number of the early Arabic thinkers and writers were Christians, who provided a useful intellectual stimulus; for the Moslems, with their reliance on the Word of God, given once and for all time in the Koran, tended to remain static and unenterprising in their thought. Nor was the rivalry of the Caliphate with

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Christian Byzantium entirely unfriendly. Scholars and technicians passed to and fro between the two Empires to their mutual benefit. The Holy War begun by the Franks ruined these good relations. The savage intolerance shown by the Crusaders was answered by growing intolerance amongst the Moslems. The broad humanity of Saladin and his family was soon to be rare amongst their fellow-believers. By the time of the Mameluks, the Moslems were as narrow as the Franks. Their Christian subjects were amongst the first to suffer from it. They never recovered their old easy acquaintanceship with their Moslem neighbours and masters. Their own intellectual life faded away, and with it the widening influence that it had upon Islam. Except in Persia, with its own disquieting heretic traditions, the Moslems enclosed themselves behind the curtain of their faith; and an intolerant faith is incapable of progress.

The harm done by the Crusades to Islam was small in comparison with that done by them to Eastern Christendom. Pope Urban II had bidden the Crusaders go forth that the Christians of the East might be helped and rescued. It was a strange rescue; for when the work was over, Eastern Christendom lay under infidel domination and the Crusaders themselves had done all that they could to prevent its recovery. When they set themselves up in the East they treated their Christian subjects no better than the Caliph had done before them. Indeed, they were sterner, for they interfered in the religious practices of the local churches. When they were ejected they left the local Christians unprotected to bear the wrath of the Moslem conquerors. It is true that the native Christians themselves earned a fuller measure of this wrath by their desperate belief that the Mongols would give them the lasting freedom that they had not obtained from the Franks. Their penalty was severe and complete. Weighed down by cruel restrictions and humiliations they dwindled into unimportance. Even their land was punished. The lovely Syrian coastline was ravaged and left desolate. The Holy City itself sank neglected into a long, untr tranquil decline.

The tragedy of the Syrian Christians was incidental to the

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failure of the Crusades; but the destruction of Byzantium was the result of deliberate malice. The real disaster of the Crusades was the inability of Western Christendom to comprehend Byzantium. Throughout the ages there have always been hopeful politicians who believe that if only the peoples of the world could come together they would love and understand each other. It is a tragic delusion. So long as Byzantium and the West had little to do with each other their relations were friendly. Western pilgrims and soldiers of fortune were welcomed in the imperial city and went home to tell of its splendours; but there were not enough of them to make friction. There were occasional bones of contention between the Byzantine Emperor and the Western Powers; but either the bone was dropped in time or some tactful formula for its division was devised. There were constant religious issues, exacerbated by the claims of the Hildebrandine Papacy. But even there, with good-will on both sides, some working arrangement could have been made. But with the Norman determination to expand into the Eastern Mediterranean a new disquieting era began. Byzantine interests were flung into sharp conflict with those of a Western people. The Normans were checked, and the Crusades were launched as a peace-making move. But there was misunderstanding from the outset. The Emperor thought that it was his Christian duty to restore his frontiers to be a bulwark against the Turks, whom he considered to be the enemy. The Crusaders wished to push on to the Holy Land. They had come to fight the Holy War against the infidels of every race. While their leaders failed to appreciate the Emperor's policy, thousands of soldiers and pilgrims found themselves in a land where the language, the customs and the religion seemed to them strange and incomprehensible and therefore wrong. They expected the peasants and citizens in the territory through which they passed not only to resemble them but also to welcome them. They were doubly disappointed. Quite failing to realize that their thieving and destructive habits could not win them the affection or the respect of their victims, they were hurt, angry and envious. Had it been

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left to the choice of the ordinary Crusading soldier Constantinople would have been attacked and sacked at a far earlier date. But the leaders of the Crusade were at first too conscious of their Christian duty and restrained their followers. Louis VII refused to accept the advice of some of his nobles and bishops to take arms against the Christian city; and though Frederick Barbarossa toyed with the idea, he controlled his anger and passed by. It was left to the greedy cynics that directed the Fourth Crusade to take advantage of a momentary weakness in the Byzantine state to plot and achieve its destruction.

The Latin Empire of Constantinople, conceived in sin, was a puny child for whose welfare the West eagerly sacrificed the needs of its children in the Holy Land. The Popes themselves were far more anxious to keep the unwilling Greeks under their ecclesiastical rule than to rescue Jerusalem. When the Byzantines recovered their capital Western pontiffs and politicians alike worked hard to restore Western control. The Crusade had become a movement not for the protection of Christendom but for the establishment of the authority of the Roman Church.

The determination of the Westerners to conquer and colonize the lands of Byzantium was disastrous for the interests of Outremer. It was more disastrous still for European civilization. Constantinople was still the centre of the civilized Christian world. In the pages of Villehardouin we see reflected the impression that it made on the knights that had come from France and Italy to conquer it. They could not believe that so superb a city could exist on earth; it was of all cities the sovereign.¹ Like most barbarian invaders, the men of the Fourth Crusade did not intend to destroy what they found. They meant to share in it and dominate it. But their greed and their clumsiness led them to indulge in irreparable destruction. Only the Venetians, with their higher

¹ 'Or poez savoir que mult esgarderent Costantinople cil qui onques mais l'avoient veüe; que il ne pooient mie cuidier que si riche ville peüst estre en tot le monde... Nuls nel poist croire se il ne le veüst a l'oïl le lonc et lé de la ville, qui de totes les autres ere souveraine' (Villehardouin, ed. Faral, I, p. 130).

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level of culture, knew what it would be most profitable to save. Italy, indeed, reaped some benefit from the decline and fall of Byzantium. The Frankish settlers in Byzantine lands, though they brought a superficial and romantic vitality to the hills and valleys of Greece, were unfitted to understand the long Greek tradition of culture. But the Italians, whose connections with Greece had never been broken for long, were better able to appreciate the value of what they took; and when the decline of Byzantium meant the dispersal of its scholars, they found a welcome in Italy. The spread of humanism in Italy was an indirect result of the Fourth Crusade.

The Italian Renaissance is a matter of pride for mankind. But it would have been better could it have been achieved without the ruin of Eastern Christendom. Byzantine culture survived the shock of the Fourth Crusade. In the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries Byzantine art and thought flowered in splendid profusion. But the political basis of the Empire was insecure. Indeed, since 1204 it was no longer an Empire but one state amongst many others as strong or stronger. Faced with the hostility of the West and the rivalry of its Balkan neighbours, it could no longer guard Christendom against the Turks. ~~It was the Crusaders themselves~~ who wilfully broke down the defence of Christendom and thus allowed the infidel to cross the Straits and penetrate into the heart of Europe. The true martyrs of the Crusade were not the gallant knights who fell fighting at the Horns of Hattin or before the towers of Acre, but the innocent Christians of the Balkans, as well as of Anatolia and Syria, who were handed over to persecution and slavery.

To the Crusaders themselves their failures were inexplicable. They were fighting for the cause of the Almighty; and if faith and logic were correct, that cause should have triumphed. In the first flush of success they entitled their chronicles the *Gesta Dei per Francos*, God's work done by the hand of the Franks. But after the First Crusade there followed a long train of disasters; and even the victories of the Third Crusade were incomplete and unsure.

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There were evil forces about which thwarted God's work. At first the blame could be laid on Byzantium, on the schismatic Emperor and his ungodly people who refused to recognize the divine mission of the Crusaders. But after the Fourth Crusade that excuse could no longer be maintained; yet things went steadily worse. Moralists preachers might claim that God was angry with His warriors because of their sins. There was some truth in this, but as complete explanation it collapsed when Saint Louis led his army into one of the greatest disasters that the Crusaders ever underwent; for Saint Louis was a man whom the medieval world believed to be without sin. In fact it was not so much wickedness as stupidity that ruined the Holy Wars. Yet such is human nature that a man will admit far more readily to being a sinner than a fool. No one amongst the Crusaders would admit that their real crimes were a wilful and narrow ignorance and an irresponsible lack of foresight.

The chief motive that impelled the Christian armies eastward was faith. But the sincerity and simplicity of their faith led them into pitfalls. It carried them through incredible hardships to victory on the First Crusade, whose success seemed miraculous. The Crusaders therefore expected that miracles would continue to save them when difficulties arose. Their confidence made them foolhardy; and even to the end, at Nicopolis as at Antioch, they were certain that they would receive divine support. Again, their faith by its very simplicity made them intolerant. Their God was a jealous God; they could never conceive it possible that the God of Islam might be the same Power. The colonists settled in Outremer might reach a wider view; but the soldiers from the West came to fight for the Christian God; and to them anyone who showed tolerance to the infidel was a traitor. Even those that worshipped the Christian God in a different ritual were suspect and deplored.

This genuine faith was often combined with unashamed greed. Few Christians have ever thought it incongruous to combine God's work with the acquisition of material advantages. That the soldiers of God should extract territory and wealth from the

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infidel was right. It was justifiable to rob the heretic and the schismatic also. Worldly ambitions helped to produce the gallant adventurousness on which much of the early success of the movement was based. But greed and the lust for power are dangerous masters. They breed impatience; for man's life is short and he needs quick results. They breed jealousy and disloyalty; for offices and possessions are limited, and it is impossible to satisfy every claimant. There was a constant feud between the Franks already established in the East and those that came out to fight the infidel and to seek their fortune. Each saw the war from a different point of view. In the turmoil of envy, distrust and intrigue, few campaigns had much chance of success. Quarrels and inefficiency were enhanced by ignorance. The colonists slowly adapted themselves to the ways and the climate of the Levant; they began to learn how their enemies fought and how to make friends with them. But the newly-come Crusader found himself in an utterly unfamiliar world, and he was usually too proud to admit his limitations. He disliked his cousins of Outremer and would not listen to them. So expedition after expedition made the same mistakes and reached the same sorry end.

Powerful and intelligent leadership might have saved the movement. But the feudal background from which the Crusaders were drawn made it difficult for a leader to be accepted. The Crusades were the Pope's work; but Papal Legates were seldom good generals. There were many able men amongst the Kings of Jerusalem; but they had little authority over their own subjects and none over their visiting allies. The Military Orders, who provided the finest and most experienced soldiers, were independent and jealous of each other. National armies led by a King seemed at one time to offer a better weapon; but though Richard of England, who was a soldier of genius, was one of the few successful commanders amongst the Crusaders, the other royal expeditions were without exception disastrous. It was difficult for any monarch to go campaigning for long in lands so far from his own. Cœur-de-Lion's and Saint Louis's sojourns in the East were made at the expense of

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the welfare of England and France. The financial cost, in particular, was appallingly high. The Italian cities could make the Crusades a profitable affair; and independent nobles who hoped to found estates or marry heiresses in Outremer might find their outlay returned. But to send the royal army overseas was a costly undertaking with very little hope of material recompense. Special taxes must be raised throughout the kingdom. It was not surprising that practical-minded kings, such as Philip IV of France, preferred to raise the taxes and then stay at home. The ideal leader, a great soldier and diplomat, with time and money to spend in the East and a wide understanding of Eastern ways, was never to be found. It was indeed less remarkable that the Crusading movement faded away in failure than that it should ever have met with success, and that, with scarcely one victory to its credit after its spectacular foundation, Outremer should have lasted for two hundred years.

The triumphs of the Crusade were the triumphs of faith. But faith without wisdom is a dangerous thing. By the inexorable laws of history the whole world pays for the crimes and follies of each of its citizens. In the long sequence of interaction and fusion between Orient and Occident out of which our civilization has grown, the Crusades were a tragic and destructive episode. The historian as he gazes back across the centuries at their gallant story must find his admiration overcast by sorrow at the witness that it bears to the limitations of human nature. There was so much courage and so little honour, so much devotion and so little understanding. High ideals were besmirched by cruelty and greed, enterprise and endurance by a blind and narrow self-righteousness; and the Holy War itself was nothing more than a long act of intolerance in the name of God, which is the sin against the Holy Ghost.