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THE

# CRUSADES:

Their Reality and Romance.

BY

SALADIN

*Author of "God and His Book," "Lays of Romance  
and Chivalry," "Roses and Rue," etc.*

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## REALITY.

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THE maddest and bloodiest picture in the history of the world is a Christian picture. As the picture is wound off the reel of Time it is two centuries in length,\* and is everywhere hideous with swords and skeletons and cinders. Like everything else in sacerdotal history, such a refulgent halo of sanctity and romance has been flung over it as to render its true and horrible lineaments almost imperceptible. It has been urged that the Crusades opened up and developed the resources of commerce, and conferred sundry other blessings upon the occidental nations. Perhaps so they did. But, if hell were to be established on Salisbury Plain, and burn all England to ten feet below the level of the Atlantic, theologians would tax their ingenuity to prove that the globe had benefited by the fiery destruction and everlasting immersion of England. Say what you may about the opening-up of commerce and the introduction of oriental culture, every footprint of the Crusades is marked with blood, every step is profaned with lust, every impulse is tainted with madness.

How was it that, for centuries before the first Crusade, under the polite permission of the caliphs of Bagdad, Christian pilgrims to the Holy Sepulchre had visited Jerusalem with impunity? How was it, if the Mohammedans were such perfidious and detested monsters, that the renowned Haroun al Raschid, with all the delicacy of oriental courtesy, sent the keys of Jerusalem as a friendly present to the Christian Charlemagne?

It was not till the incursions from the madhouses and

\* The Crusades were carried on from the end of the eleventh till the end of the thirteenth century.

piggeries of Europe became intolerable, that caliph Hakem felt induced to put a curb upon the fanatical nuisance. If a polite and tolerant Mohammedan had still been caliph, the pilgrims might still have gone unscathed ; but they had now to do with one of their own persecuting and intolerant breed. Caliph Hakem was *the son of a Christian woman*. Besides, the pilgrim nuisance had never been so abominable as now. The Rev. xx. 2-3 *canard* respecting the fast-approaching end of the world,\* had poured into Europe a religious rabblement without precedent in the previous ages. Numbers of devout wastrels managed to return from their pious peddling Jerusalemward, and to represent how they had been snubbed and kicked by the subjects of the Fatamite caliphs. Nobody seemed to mind whether the pilgrims had been snubbed and kicked or not—perhaps thinking that, even if they had been, they had got only their deserts—till a clapper-tongued religious lunatic, Monk Peter of Amiens, known as Peter the Hermit, magnified his kicking into an outrage upon Christendom, and thereby unscrewed the sluices which poured forth rivers of human blood, heaped Asia Minor with human skeletons, and made history march for two hundred years up and down a hideous Golgotha.

“Is,” bawled Peter, “the land which was trodden by the feet of the blessed Redeemer to be soiled and insulted by the sandals of the followers of the Camel-Driver of Islam? Is it possible that over Tabor, the scene of the Transfiguration—over Olivet, from which the Saviour ascended into heaven—the Crescent banner of an alien faith shall be permitted to wave? Shall the Infidel be allowed to perform his revolting rites over the site of the manger at Bethlehem? Shall a race that knows not the Lord jabber its pagan litanies in the Garden of Gethsemane, and by the Pool of Siloam? Shall the muezzin sound where sounded the voice of Jesus? Shall the spot be blasted with desecration whence the cross flung its shadow down the brow of Calvary, and shall heathen scimitars guard the Holy Grave where the body of the Lord was laid, the spices and the myrrh

\* See Saladin's “The Divine Interpretation of Scripture: A Reply to Cardinal Manning.”

of his entombment mingling with the blood from his hands and feet and wounded side and thorn-pierced brow—the blood of God himself, designed to redeem a lost world from the eternal torments of the damned? Is this, and the insult and murder of the pilgrims to the tomb of God, to be endured? By the arm of Omnipotence, No! Are there no hearts in Europe, no swords in Christendom—is there no blood in France that is ready to be shed to avenge the sacrilege to the blood that darkened the rough bark of the tree at Calvary at the hour when Death and Hell were conquered; when the sun grew dark in the heavens, when the veil of the Temple was rent and the graves of Salem gave up their dead? For the blood of the Son of God are ye prepared to give the blood of the sons of Men? In this case, he who would save his life shall lose it. May torment unutterable be his who would for a moment think of his safety or his life, when the God who gave them demands that they be laid down in his cause! Horse and stirrup, sword and lance, the spear, the gipon, and the shirt of mail! Rush on their battalia like a boiling torrent, and hurl the Infidel to Death and Hell, or may Tophet and agony eternal wait upon you and yours, even to the end of the world! To Jerusalem! to Jerusalem! Rescue the Holy Sepulchre! Hear in my voice the voice of Doom, and see in the heavens the arm of the Almighty waving you on to the East to rescue the tomb where his Son was laid!”

The response was a roar of voices and a clash of swords. “*Deus vult*,” quoth the monks; and the laity murmured, “It is the will of God.” So much for the oratory of Peter, puny, ragged, and dirty, bareheaded, barefooted, riding on an ass, and driven crazy by the naggings of a vixenish wife much older than himself.

Thus, or somehow thus, were the orations of the Hermit, and accompanied by forceful and vehement gesticulations, and hissed and thundered and gasped with all the intensity and fury of fanatical rhetoric; and their effect may easily be imagined upon an age that was romantic or nothing, and a people strongly disposed to religious emotion and martial enterprise. The oratory of the Hermit set France on fire. The land seethed and

boiled and reeled under the lava and detonations of an oratorical volcano. Wild dreams usurped the place of sober, waking life. A mad medley rushed to Peter to offer their services to him or to whoever would lead them to Judea to rescue the Holy Sepulchre.

Provisions and modes of transport were overlooked. All classes and conditions of men flew to arms and insisted upon being led at once to Jerusalem. The sick rose from the bed of disease or death ; the lame and crippled came with their staves and crutches ; the noble brought his riches, and the beggar his wallet. Women left their spindles and their cows, their embroidery and their tapestry, to don helmet and gauntlets and carry sword and flame into the Holy Land. And, rapidly, helter-skelter, from all quarters, came the miscreant and the scoundrel, the liar, the thief, the ravisher, and the murderer, for had not Pope Urban II. and his priests promised absolution from all sin to whomsoever should take up arms to win back to Christendom the Tomb of Jesus? Christendom put weapons in the hands of all its scoundrelism and harness on the backs of all its villainy, and hounded them on frantically to slaughter in the name of him who has been called the Prince of Peace ! A Goose and a Goat were borne in front of the excited rabblement, the one well symbolising its folly and the other its lechery. Its horrible cruelty was above symbolisation ; it was written with sword and torch in a long trail of over 600 miles, proceeding from the centre of France till lost in the wilds of Syria.

The great multitude which no man could number surged about in its hundreds of thousands, leaving all to God, but somehow breaking itself up into three huge armies, the first led by Gaultier Habenichts, known in France as "Sans Avoir," and in England as "Walter the Penniless." The second army was under the command of Peter the Hermit, in person ; and the third was led by Gottschalk, a monk, raving mad with religious fanaticism.

Away rolled these armies Palestineward, a surging, muddy, and boiling river of the social scum and refuse of Europe. The very sort of rabble that the Roman historians tell us first embraced the Christian faith now,

eleven centuries later, laid on the Christian shrine the offering of their filthy hearts and dirty swords. And now, some six centuries later still, the scum of England lays its rowdy hymn and horrid tambourine on the shrine of the same faith—ever the same rabid rabble through all the centuries, whether it follow General Booth or Walter the Penniless! I mourn the fact, and, with all the valour of despair, set myself to the task of Sisyphus.

“Is that Jerusalem?” was the cry of the ignorant host whenever on their march a town came in sight. If the leaders, many of whom were nearly as ignorant as their followers, had led their hosts to Rome, Paris, or London, and cried, “There is Jerusalem!” these European capitals would have been razed to the ground, and the first stone pig-sty discovered in any of them would probably have been hailed as the Holy Sepulchre, and any hog’s bristles collected therein would likely have been adored as the hairs of Jesus. On, dying by hundreds and thousands, the motley multitude pursued its way, and the wolf followed for the carnival of human flesh, and great coveys of ravens and vultures darkened the sky overhead. On, in front, went the Goat and the Goose, and on, behind, followed every fool (and worse) with the sign of the cross upon his shoulder, symbolical of the two transverse sticks to which his deity was alleged to have been nailed. But carpenter or tom-cat, god or cockroach, would have served equally well as a peg upon which to hang the antics of ignorant fanaticism.

Slaughter, rapine, and ravishment were the order of the day wherever the hosts of the Crusaders rolled. Having made no provisions for their march, leaving that to “Providence,” they ate up and devoured everything that lay within reach. Those who resisted their rapine were run through the body with spears, or cleft to the chin with axes, as enemies of God, and their wives and daughters were violated, and then butchered by the soldiers of Jesus on their march to thrust back the Infidel from the stone sepulchre that had belonged to Joseph of Arimathea. The Crusading camp itself—containing thousands of she-fanatics from Christendom—was a saturnalia of barbarous licentiousness. Loose rein was given to almost unheard-of and unprecedented iniquities,

for had not the Church impressed upon the mob the assurance that taking up arms against the Infidel was an atonement for every possible transgression, and that all who now set out for the Old Jerusalem on earth had thereby secured an incontestible right to enter the New Jerusalem in heaven?

What disease and debauchery and famine had left of the holy rabble trailed along through Hungary. The Hungarians hailed them as brother Christians bound upon a sacred errand, and wished them God-speed. But they soon discovered that the pious Crusaders were only a horde of impious fiends, who repaid hospitality with cruelty, rapine, and lust. This was too much for the Hungarians. Stung to retaliation by deeds of wrong, outrage and base ingratitude, they flew to arms, and falling upon the disordered rear of the Crusaders, saved some thousands of them the trouble of proceeding any further towards the Holy Land by leaving their corpses to rot on the plains of Hungary. On the still numerous remnant swarmed into Bulgaria. The Bulgarians flew to arms to guard the mountain passes against the murdering and ravishing demons of the Red Cross; and hundreds and thousands, instead of being privileged to set foot on the Holy Land or cross swords with the Infidel, under the weapons of brother Christians, left their bodies to feed the eagles of the Thracian hills.

At last, about one-third of the horde that left France, footsore and worn, haggard and gaunt, hungry, ragged, and naked, malodorous from putrid wounds, wild with hardship, mad with fanaticism, and festering with vermin, staggered into Constantinople, the unquenchable fire of theological frenzy still blazing within them, and urging them on to Jerusalem and the tomb, where their carpenter and world-maker was alleged to have lain.

The experiences of the multitude under the Hermit were much the same as those of the multitude that followed Walter the Penniless. Of them too, a miserable remnant reached Constantinople. The third army, under Gottschalk, never got so far. It was treacherously fallen upon by the Hungarians and put to the sword, no man or woman being allowed to escape to tell the tale. And yet their fate was, perhaps, less tragic than that of their



brethren, who, by dint of strong constitution and indomitable hardihood, had reached Constantinople. They crossed over into Syria, only to be mowed down like grass under the sharp and crooked scimitars of the very Infidel Turks they, under the auspices of their deity, had set out so confidently to vanquish. And all this in thy blessed memory, O Jesus! Here were ravages of fire and sword, to which the destruction of the army of Xerxes is almost insignificant, and the retreat of Napoleon from blazing Moscow to

“ Berescina’s icy flood,  
Riven with shot and thawed with blood.”

Still mad with priestcraft, indomitable and undaunted, Christendom poured out her treasure and her life to drive the Infidel from the Holy Land. But all in vain. The votaries of the Camel-Driver had still the best of it against the followers of the Carpenter. The excesses and crimes of the Christians had been such that, at length, it occurred to them that their non-success might be heaven’s retaliation upon them for their wickedness. Damascus, they became convinced, could not be taken by the guilty; so they determined to try the effect of a siege by the innocent. Accordingly, *an army of children* was the craze of the year 1212. A contemporary monkish chronicler writes: “There came together, from different countries, I know not how, so many children that they made a formidable army. These little ones had standards carried before them, setting forth that they were going to cross the sea, and that the Holy Land had been assigned to them as an inheritance, as it had been to the children of Israel. In whatever town they arrived, the inhabitants received them in the name of God.”

This army of child Crusaders was led by a boy named Nicolas, a native of Cologne. Two ship-loads of Crusading children were embarked at Genoa; but they never reached Palestine. The boys were sold as slaves and the girls to the oriental harems of the Infidel. The children had been taught to expect that the Mediterranean would divide, as the Red Sea had done before the Israelites, and let them pass over to

Syria on dry land. But when the poor little dupes found that the Mediterranean would not oblige in the manner they had been led to expect it would, as many as could find room were crowded into the two ships, and of the thousands left behind, the greater number died of starvation, and all for the traditional grave of this priest-invented Jew !

More than one army of children took the cross and were equipped for the Holy Land ; but only to the advantage of the slave-owner and the master of the harem. And the Christian chroniclers are compelled to admit that certain monks and traders were active in getting up child-crusades in order that they might enrich themselves by shipping off the boys to be sold for slavery, and the girls for prostitution. And all this in thy name and for thy glory, O Jesus ; and here, nearly nineteen centuries after thy alleged crucifixion, I am called an "Infidel," because I yearn to waken Man from the nightmare of Priestcraft, and lead him forth into the bracing morning of a more rational and a happier world !

The Christians teach that man was made in the image of God, and that his body is "the temple of the Holy Ghost ;" and yet they voraciously ate "the temple of the Holy Ghost"—roast infant, and occasionally roast adult, appeared on the tables or turned on the spits of the Crusaders. Moreover, in the plain of Nice alone, the Infidel piled up a mountain\* of Christian bones ; and at a subsequent siege the crusaders themselves made use of cartloads of human corpses to construct a military rampart. So much for the use to which they put the ruins of certain temples of the Holy Ghost !

"Not fair to visit all this upon the Church—only the barbarism of the times," urges the Christian apologist. "You, sir, distort and travesty history to suit your purposes as a special pleader." Not so, Stiggins of Bethel, as regards the barbarous excesses of the Christians and their thirst for retaliation, blood and savagery. We go to the "Infidel" for magnanimity and mercy, and to the "Faithful" for pusillanimity and cruelty. We have room for one contrast only between the followers of him who

\* Anna Comnena describes the pile as *οστων κολonos* and as *ύψηλον και βαθος και πλατος αξιολογωτατον*.

drove a camel and the votaries of him who rode upon an ass.

When, in 637, Jerusalem surrendered at discretion after a four months' siege, Ali, the general of the Arabian forces, sent, in accordance with one of the terms of capitulation, to request that the caliph should come in person to ratify the articles and take possession. The master of Persia and Syria rode, in the most simple and unostentatious manner, from Medina to Jerusalem on a red camel, carrying a bag of corn and one of dates, a wooden dish, and a leathern water-bottle. On his arrival he issued the following proclamation:—

IN THE NAME OF THE MOST MERCIFUL GOD.

From Omar Ebno'l Alchitâb to the inhabitants of CŒlia. They shall be protected and secured, both in their lives and their fortunes, and their churches shall neither be pulled down nor made use of by any but themselves.

The caliph rode into the city by the side of Sophronius the patriarch, conversing on the antiquities of the place. When the hour of prayer struck they were in the Church of the Resurrection. The patriarch bade the caliph pray where he was (that was in a Christian church); but he would not. He then took him into the Church of Constantine (another Christian church), and laid a mat for him to pray there; but he still refused. At last, he went out alone, and knelt on the steps outside. He afterwards told the patriarch that he had refused to pray in any Christian church because, had he done so, his followers might have seized it, and thereby broken his promise to the Christians to respect their places of religious worship. He further enjoined that even on the steps they should pray only singly, nor should they meet there to go to prayers, nor should the muezzin stand there to call the people to prayer, lest thereby the Moslems might annoy the conquered Christians. This knightly faith and magnanimous toleration was natural to a cultivated and learned race, among whom were ever circulating such maxims as: "The ink of the doctor is equally valuable with the blood of the martyr;" "Paradise is as much for him who has rightly used the pen as for him who has fallen by the sword;" "The world is

sustained by four things only—the learning of the wise, the justice of the great, the prayers of the good, and the valour of the brave.”

We have seen the Infidel picture of the capture of Jerusalem ; now let us see the Christian one. When, at last, the ramparts and towers of the Holy City yielded to the battering-engines of Godfrey, the Christian victory was signalled not by courteous and magnanimous restraint, but by sanguinary and relentless massacre. Three mortal days the Crusaders gave up to the work of carnage. Far from their, like Omar, respecting the religious convictions of the vanquished, they burned the Jews to death in their synagogues, and mixed with the ruins of the captured city the bodies of 70,000 Moslems whom they had slain with the sword. Down blazed the sun upon fire-blackened and siege-shattered masonry, upon stones, and rafters, and mud caked deep with gore, and the stench grew insupportable. A plague ensued, and many of the Christian victors mingled their plague-stricken corpses with those of the 70,000 Moslems who had escaped the fever that followed by having previously perished by the sword.

Drenched with the blood of 70,000 of the defenceless vanquished, the Christians ascended the hill of Calvary with all the paraphernalia of monks and crucifixes, candles, banners, incense, and anthems, and performed their incantations on the mount upon which their baleful Galilean was said to have perished. They kissed the stone (or some stone or other) which had covered the mouth of his grave, and perpetrated religious antics in honour of the “redeemer” who has blighted the world.

True, certain of the later of the Seven Crusades were better managed than the first ; but they were all alike mad and detestable and bloody. The most romantic of them all was the third, in which that big, steel-shirted swashbuckler and adulterer, and something else unspeakable, Richard Cœur de Lion, bore such a prominent part. “*Help us the Holy Grave, O God!*” was the battle-cry under which he and his Knights Templar and Hospitallers rushed, in heavy Teuton lustihood, among the slim and comparatively unarmed felaheen, and mowed them down like grass before the scythe. When before Ascalon it

was his boast, that every day he brought back to his tent ten, twelve, or twenty heads of Infidels he had slain—slain for the difference between Tweedledum and Tweedledee, the difference between the Camel-Driver of Mecca and the Carpenter of Bethlehem.

Killing an Infidel was to him much the same as shooting a partridge is to a modern sportsman. There had been abundance shed for Jesus during the preceding centuries; but now every drop of blood said to have reddened the cross at Calvary demanded a river of human gore. He who said, "I came not to bring peace, but a sword," redeemed his promise, and the land of his birth was drunk with massacre. On the surrender of Acre to his followers, they bargained that a piece of the true cross which had been captured from them should be restored, and that the sum of 200,000 talents should be paid to them. For the payment of this sum Cœur de Lion held the prisoners taken at Acre as hostages. Saladin, the one glorious name connected with the Crusades, failed to raise the money from his financially-exhausted people, and Richard deliberately led 2,700 hostages outside the city walls and gave his soldiers holiday sport in beheading them. The pastime was intensely enjoyed, and participated in with joke and jest, and laughter and oath, 2,700 heads lay there in ghastly heaps, and 2,700 headless corpses reeked in the hot Syrian sun. The followers of the son of Mary had stripped to their work. Their blades were red from point to hilt; their faces were bespattered with, and their clothes were soaked with blood. They stood in blood to the ankles, and stumbled and reeled over corpses, bandying their slang and chanting their songs of bawd and revel. Glorious amusement! they had butchered the defenceless prisoners in the name of the Nazarene! The sun went down upon that Aeldama, and in the groves and vineyards of Palestine died away the Crusader's vesper cry: "*Help us the Holy Grave, O God!*"

## ROMANCE.

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AT Ascalon, Richard I. was seized with fever. But even severe illness could not abate the warlike ardour of his temperament; and when he could no longer stand upon his feet, he ordered that he should be carried in front of the walls on a litter, that he might superintend operations, and incite the Christians to a vigorous prosecution of the siege.

Ha! ha! my veins are raging hot,  
My hectic senses reel!  
Pshaw, fever! Bring my harness, squire,  
My morion of steel.  
I cannot live supine like this,  
And die like coward slave;  
Ho, reeling front of battle be  
The death-bed of the brave!

No, no, my Berengaria!  
Take that bandage from my head;  
And bring me, gentle wife of mine,  
The iron helm instead:  
And put thy snow-white favour  
In my plume, so dark and high;  
Steel harness be my winding-sheet,  
A soldier let me die!

Know, in this sainted Palestine,  
The Saviour died for me;  
And my good sword and strong right arm,  
Shall strike for Him, and thee.

And ne'er shall heathen sandals tread,  
 And heathen banners wave ;  
 O'er the garden of His agony,  
 The glory of His grave !

No ! o'er the Moslem turban,  
 And the flashing scimitar ;  
 We'll pour the hosts of England,  
 In the thunder-crash of war.  
 On, warriors of the high crusade,  
 Bended bow and swinging sword ;  
 And wave o'er pagan Ascalon  
 The banner of the Lord !

Gird on my heavy armour,  
 Bring my war-horse from the stall ;  
 Sound the trumpet, shout Jehovah !  
 Forward, onward to the wall !  
 Come, gentle Berengaria,  
 Through the vizer bars a kiss ;  
 And I'll leave to weak old women,  
 A dying bed like this.

Let Leopold of Austria  
 Die thus, when die he may ;  
 Let craven Philip breathe his last,  
 Far from the battle fray.  
 The couch of Richard Lion-heart,  
 Must be the crimson sod,  
 Where, 'neath the bannered cross, he fought  
 For glory and for God.

See, holy Carmel's dark with shame,  
 Red blushes Jordan's tide ;  
 That Saladin should hold a day,  
 The land where Jesus died.  
 Ho ! where the dead lie thickest,  
 Upon earth's groaning breast,  
 At eve, search for King Richard,  
 And lay him to his rest !

And not in dear old England,  
 Lay you your leader dead ;  
 But deep within this holy land,  
 Lay you his helmèd head.  
 Not English oak, but Syrian palm,  
 Shall guard his soldier's grave ;  
 In the sainted land he lived to love,  
 The land he died to save !

Oh, Salem, for thy Holy Tomb,  
 Oh, England for thy throne,  
 King Death shall find King Richard,  
 With his armour girded on :  
 He'll greet thee, King of Terrors,  
 O'er Jordan's mortal flood,  
 With a forehead wreathed in laurel,  
 And a hand imbrued in blood !

Come, laggard knights, I charge you,  
 Haste, ere the sun go down ;  
 And bear me on your shoulders,  
 To the ramparts of the town !  
 Plunge him amid the battle shock,  
 The grapple, yell, and groan ;  
 That Death may find King Richard,  
 With his armour girded on !