



## THE CHILDREN'S CRUSADE.

BY NOAH BROOKS.

MORE than six hundred years ago, there began and ended a movement among the children of France and Germany, of which the world seems now to remember very little. It was a crusade to recover the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem. It is hard to understand in these days how an army of men could be raised for such a purpose. It is more difficult to explain why thousands of children, without arms, provisions or equipments for so long a journey, should leave their native land and try to reach far-off Palestine to rescue the tomb of Our Saviour from the hands of unbelievers. But this was attempted by the Children of the Crusade, in the year of Our Lord 1212.

The Saracens, under the Caliph Omar, took possession of the Holy Land, A. D. 637. Although the places held most sacred in the eyes of the Christians of that time thus passed into the possession of people of a hostile faith, devout pilgrims were still permitted to visit the spots made memorable by tradition. To worship at spots believed to be hallowed by Our Lord's birth, suffer-

ings and death, men journeyed across continents, suffered untold hardships, forsook home and friends, often lost their lives, and thus earned, as they thought, the especial favor of God and an abundant entrance into heaven.

But, as the centuries moved on, the Saracen rulers were less favorably disposed toward the Christian pilgrims, who now were worried in various ways, were shamefully treated, and forbidden to keep the sacred places in repair. This ill news spread throughout Europe. In all the Roman Catholic courts there was much indignation. The Pope, then the great potentate of Christendom, was deeply stirred by the tidings brought him by returning pilgrims. Peter the Hermit, a zealous man, who had seen with his own eyes the indignities practiced by the Saracens, began to preach a crusade. He traversed many Christian kingdoms, calling on rulers and people to rescue the Holy Sepulchre from the hands of unbelievers. Urban II., then Pope of Rome, sanctioned the movement. The multitude took up the cause,

crying "God wills it! God wills it!" And thus the first crusade began.

Those who entered the enterprise wore a cross of cloth on the breast or shoulder. Bearing thus the sacred emblem, they became crusaders—cross-bearers.

Several hundred thousand people—nobles, knights and soldiers—finally marched upon the Holy Land in 1096. These were divided into four armies. They met with divers fortunes, and out of the vast body of crusaders, only 21,500 soldiers at last reached Jerusalem. The Holy City fell into their hands, and Godfrey of Bouillon was chosen head of the Latin kingdom of Palestine. This power melted away in the lapse of time, and in 1145 another crusade became necessary to restore the Holy Sepulcher to Christian keeping. This was begun in 1146. It was undertaken by France and Germany. It was unsuccessful, and a third crusade was soon after resolved upon. In this great movement all Christendom was engaged. Of those whose names are most prominent in the history of the time, Richard I., King of England, surnamed "The Lion-Hearted," has been longest remembered as a chivalric sovereign and a puissant crusader.

A fourth crusade was thought necessary in 1200, the victorious results of the third crusade having faded away by that time. In this the French, assisted by the Venetians, were chiefly concerned. The ultimate effects of a long campaign were not satisfactory. The Holy Land was overrun once more by the Mohammedans, and the new Turkish power became firmly established on the border of Europe in Asia Minor.

At the beginning of the thirteenth century, Europe was jarred by numerous wars; some of them were domestic, and others had been undertaken by royal or noble adventurers, greedy for conquest. Fire and the sword had passed from kingdom to kingdom; the people were impoverished and sick of violence and war. Civilization was at a low ebb, and men everywhere were weary of their long struggles for peace. Into this condition of society came wayworn pilgrims from the Holy Land, bringing tidings of the wretched plight of the shrines which Christian hands had reared, and telling harrowing tales of the indignities heaped on holy men who went to worship or pay their vows at the birthplace and sepulcher of Our Lord.

To these appeals for succor there was no response. The country was poor and the people tired of wars. We can suppose that the preaching of the excited pilgrims fell on the ears of men who sullenly asked themselves, "Will it pay?" There could be but one answer. Europe was filled with outlaws; the people were sore distressed; robber

barons dwelt in strongholds, whence they issued to ravage vast tracts of country; and only in the crowded, want-stricken cities was there any security for life and property. A crusade would not pay. The popular religion of the times was not much better than heathenism; and the threats and entreaties of priests were alike unheeded.

In the gloomy old town of Cloyes, situated in the part of France now known as the Department of Eure-et-Loire, in 1212, lived a young lad named Stephen. The scant history of the times tells us only that he was a shepherd boy, that he was about sixteen years old, and that he tended a flock on the hills of the Loire, which flows through the town. His family name is not recorded; he is known in history only as Stephen of Cloyes.

Stephen had heard the passionate appeals of the priests, and had seen the tears of returning pilgrims as they recounted the perils of the way to the Holy Land and pictured the sufferings which Our Lord had endured through his disciples at Jerusalem. His heart had been stirred within him as he saw that there was not one to help the distressed Church and her faithful cross-bearers. He had talked of these things in his rude companionship; he had mused over them in his solitude among the hills of the Loire. As he mused, the fire burned.

There to him appeared, one day, a strange man, who commended his zeal and pious tears. To the wonder-stricken, rapt youth he announced himself as Jesus Christ. He gave him a commission to preach a crusade to the children, promising that he should lead to Palestine an army that should occupy the land and restore the Holy Sepulcher. Into his hand he delivered a letter to the King of France, commanding the monarch to aid the Heaven-appointed apostle of the new crusade. Filled with rapture, Stephen flew to his parents, told his marvelous story, and exhibited his celestial letter to the king. The simple people listened with amazement and perplexity. They asked for the heavenly visitant; but he had disappeared as mysteriously as he came. We can only guess who and what he was. Probably, he was a priest of the neighborhood, who, hearing of Stephen's kindling enthusiasm, had disguised himself in pilgrim garb, and had thus visited and misled the simple boy.

Stephen soon proved how apt a pupil he was. Fired with strange ardor and gifted with great natural powers of oratory, the lad kindled innumerable hearts with burning zeal. Leaving Cloyes, he went to the city of St. Denys, then famous as the burial-place of the martyr Dionysius. Placing himself before the shrine of this early victim to the rage of the heathen, he addressed the multitudes who came thither to worship. In glow-

ing language, he pictured the desolation which the Moslems had wrought in the sacred city, and contrasted with it the comfort and ease with which his hearers were surrounded. Here were gilded shrines, costly vestments, and clouds of incense. Yet the person of Christ was once more wounded in the bodies of those who would bow at His manger; and no pious hand restored the ruin which wicked men had wrought upon His tomb. Men had failed, he said, to redeem Jerusalem. Proud barons and powerful kings had been defeated in their attempts to regain for Christendom the holy places. Now Christ had promised the children that they should recover the Holy Land and restore the Holy Sepulcher. The armies of the Lord, led by the power of kings and princes, had been overthrown by the Mohammedan. At last, out of the weakness of children, God had ordained strength.

The people heard with awe, not unmixed with doubt. The religion of the time was overlaid with much ridiculous superstition. Legends of heathen deities were intermingled with monkish tales and lies. Divine appearances and angelic visitations were believed to be common; and not a few were ready to accept Stephen as a divinely-appointed prophet. He is said to have healed the sick by his touch; and the fame of his youth, piety, and high mission spread far and wide. Nevertheless, there was no movement of the people toward his banner. Men were disturbed by the civil wars that then rent France. There were many rulers, and the fertile provinces of that beautiful land were trampled by hostile forces. But the children were caught up by this strange enthusiasm. Like a contagion, the crusading spirit spread from Brittany to the Rhine. Stephen traversed the country, speeding from city to city, and everywhere calling on the children to hear the voice of God commanding them to save the Holy City from the defilement of the Moslems.

The young apostle must have been a youth of rare power. His appearance was in all places hailed with wild enthusiasm. He fascinated the children and youth. Inspired by his words, these young people seemed to be transfused with an unaccountable zeal. They passed into a state of spiritual exaltation not now easily to be understood. Boys and girls, of ten or twelve years of age, left their games and toys, or their tasks and homes, and joined the three-pointed, blood-red banner of the young crusader. Here and there, minor prophets sprang up, preaching the sacred mission of Stephen and avowing him as their leader. Like a flame the movement spread, sweeping children of tender years, and even maturer youths, into the ranks of the augmenting army. Children escaped

from the confinement in which parents thought it necessary to put them; they were deaf to the voice of authority and the call of affection. They flew, they ran, they poured, they tumultuously streamed to the banner of the Children's Crusade, reëchoing once more the cry which had followed the fiery cross of Peter the Hermit, "God wills it! God wills it!"

The King of France was forced to turn his attention from his ambitious and selfish plans, and to regard attentively this phenomenon. Not daring to suppress a crusade, he asked the opinion of the University of Paris. The learned doctors of that conclave very sensibly, we must think, advised that the matter be stopped. This was not so easy. The infatuation had grown too strong in volume. The government was powerless against these elusive streams of singing, praying children. Like a rolling snowball, the vast mass grew as it moved, until countless numbers had poured into the columns of Stephen's army. People were aghast at their own inability to lay a straw in the way of this wonderful army. It was currently reported and believed to be the work of evil spirits in the guise of heavenly visitants. Some said that this was the result of a scheme of the King of the Mountains, a mysterious potentate who was believed to live somewhere in Syria. This person was supposed to be chief of the Assassins, a band of trained secret murderers, from whose name and occupation we derive our word "assassin." The credulous French common-people believed that the chief of the Assassins had instigated this movement in order to procure recruits for his service.

Yet, many grown people embraced the faith preached by Stephen; they fed his followers, encouraged their children in their resolution to join the crusade, and not a few followed the army. There were also abandoned and wicked persons who joined themselves to the host; they saw an opportunity to practice their vile arts, or they concealed themselves in the throng while they plundered the country through which the army passed. Their evil influence pervaded the ranks; many youths were ruined in body and soul; demoralization and discontent spread; and, before the throng was out of France, the seeds of destruction were terribly sown.

News of this strange uprising sped swiftly throughout Europe. Pilgrims returning to Germany from the sacred shrines of France, told the story of the boy prophet as they trudged wearily up the fertile lands of the Rhine. Near the old city of Cologne, where lie the fabled bones of the three wise men of the East, lived a boy named Nicholas. He was then ten years old. His family, like that of Stephen, was humble; and we only

know him now as Nicholas of Cologne. He heard of the great success of Stephen, and, incited by his father, who is said to have been a bad man, he began to preach in Germany the Children's Crusade. He also pretended to have a divine commission; and this, he related, came to him in a blazing picture in the sky, where he saw a fiery cross and a command to go and rescue the Holy Sepulcher.

His success was immediate and very great. Youths of all stations and ranks came at his call. Sons of nobles and high-born lads from the castles of knightly renown hastened to join his banner. Expostulation was in vain; and, as in France, the strange madness spread until Cologne was overflowing with an army, and tens of thousands were camped in the country outside the walls.

Early in the summer of 1212, Nicholas marshaled his army. It was twenty thousand strong; and on its skirts hung the dissolute and bad, who, as in France, were eager to embrace this opportunity to plunder, mislead, and corrupt. Heedless of these evil influences, the children,—gentle and simple, noble and serf-born,—ennobled by a common inspiration, formed themselves into three columns, and began their march to Palestine.

With banners fluttering in the soft summer air, songs joyfully ringing as they moved, and crosses borne aloft, they passed down the banks of the Rhine. These twenty thousand children could find no place large enough to lodge them; they had no stores of provisions, except where some of the sons and daughters of nobles had been provided with supplies and attendants by their parents. For the most part, therefore, they camped in forests, by running streams, or sought lodging in cattle-sheds and rude cottages by the way. They begged their scanty repast from the inhabitants of the country, fed on roots and berries, and often went forth hungry in the morning and lay down to sleep at night pursued by gnawing hunger. Many wasted away and fell among the rocky paths before they had left German soil. Others were received into houses on the route, and so roamed no more.

Passing into Switzerland, then a collection of little principalities without any central government, they were inhospitably received. Even Southern Germany was a rude country and sparsely peopled by half-savage men. But the country now called Switzerland was even less civilized. Moreover, the people who inhabited the valleys of the Alps (into which they now passed) were unfriendly toward the Germans. The land was full of savage beasts; wolves, bears, and other frightful creatures prowled along the margin of this moving human stream, snatching off the stragglers, picking up the

wounded, or dashing into the night encampment in pursuit of their prey.

Still, the devoted band pressed on toward Italy. Their songs were exchanged for sighs, but up the Alps they climbed. With wounded and bleeding feet, they crept over the rocky ledges or plunged into the icy torrents. At night, drenched with chilly rain, they lay down on stony pillows or sank upon the ground. Some who sought rest on these inhospitable couches never woke again, but slept away their hapless lives amidst Alpine snows. Others stripped themselves of their tattered garments to shelter a freezing brother, sister or companion, and so perished nakedly, the unnamed heroes of the Children's Crusade.

Singly or in straggling bands, many turned their faces homeward. But even these were too far spent to reach Germany again. They perished miserably in their feebleness; and the comfortable homes of Fatherland knew them no more. So great was the mortality among the children of the German nobility, that a century passed away before the effects of this great inroad upon the flower of the nation had ceased to be apparent.

At length, reaching the last declivity of the Alps, the German children beheld the superb city of Genoa. Its marble palaces and cathedral spires gleamed in the warm sunlight; around rolled the verdurous valleys and hill-sides; and beyond sparkled the blue Mediterranean. Filled with joy, they forgot their hardships and raised a song of triumph. Neglected banners were once more unfurled; crosses waved on high; and, renewed by the brightness of the moment, this strange inundation precipitated itself upon the plains of Italy.

Of the twenty thousand fair-haired youths who had left Germany, only seven thousand were left to knock at the gates of Genoa. The rest—well, we know how they had perished by the way. We can guess how, as their young lives went out, their sufferings must have pained the very ear of a merciful God. We can imagine the dreadful story of their woes as they sank beneath the afflictions of hunger, cold, and disease, along the paths which these seven thousand had threaded. The army of the crusaders has long since melted away. We know very little of the young enthusiasts, or even of the people who must have known them; but, while time endures, the pathetic story of their journey across the Alps shall be told with wonder and with tears.

Seven thousand German boys, the flower of the Rhine lands, rugged survivors of an army of children, demanded one day's rest in Genoa. On the morrow, they confidently said, God would open a path through the sea. They wanted neither arms nor transportation. They were on the way to

preach Christ to the Moslem. God had promised to cleave the waters of the Mediterranean for them, so that they might go over dry-shod to convert the cruel Saracen to the Christian faith. They were granted their request by the wondering senators. And the strange procession of ragged, shoeless and sun-browned children passed into Genoa, singing their wild crusading hymns.

The people were greatly moved, and knew not what to make of this strange spectacle. It was

by the shore, longing and expecting a marvelous deliverance. But it never came. The sun sank toward the horizon. Their brief allowance of time had passed; and, with weary steps and slow, they passed out of the city and gathered in the fields.

It was impossible to go back. It were better to die in Italy than to reascend the Alps. Some found homes in Genoa and thereabouts; but the main body passed along the sea toward Pisa, then one of the great free cities of Italy—rival of Genoa



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feared that so many pilgrims would bring a famine into the city. The effect of their example was dreaded by parents of impressible children. Moreover, Genoa sided with the Pope, who was then at war with the Emperor of Germany, Otho the Superb. These children must not long stay in the city. On the morrow (Sunday, August 26, 1212), they rose in haste and rushed to the seaside. Alas! the tide rose and fell, lapping the marble walls and quays as before. There was no path through the sea. All day they waited, but no divine miracle came to relieve them. They sat down in groups

and Venice. Here they were doubtfully received; and a few, giving up their hope in a miraculous passage of the sea, accepted an offer to take ship to the Holy Land. We cannot follow these. It is believed that they finally reached Ptolemais, the only port in Asia Minor then in the hands of the Christians. They went no further. The city was beleaguered by the Moslems; and into the motley population of Ptolemais this detachment of the Children's Crusade melts away and is heard of no more.

The remnant of the army of Nicholas pursued

their way to Rome, the seat of the papal power being their only source of light and counsel. The Pope (Innocent) received them kindly, but without encouragement. He told them that they must give up their crusade; but, with curious hardness, he said that they were still bound to their vows, and when they had reached maturer years they must recommence the undertaking that he now declared futile.

Here, then, the last of the followers of Nicholas found rest. In Rome, where so many modern pilgrims have thought they gained their nearest glimpse of the glories of Heaven, the boys of Germany ended their crusade. They disappear in the thronging multitudes of the Eternal City, and find no more place on the pages of history.

Another body of German children followed that led by Nicholas. These were about ten thousand in number; but why they were not included in the previous army we cannot tell. There is no explanation of their course; no record of the names of their leaders. We only know that they pursued a slightly different course from that of their predecessors; that they met the same privations; suffered also from hunger, thirst and exposure; and that they finally reached Italy reduced in numbers, and that they rested at last at Brundisium. From this port, at the extreme edge of the Italian peninsula, they expected to cross to the Holy Land. They found means of transportation; and, embarking on board several ships that were offered them, they sailed away into oblivion. All trace of them is lost. We cannot tell whether they suffered shipwreck and so were swallowed up in the sea, or whether they were sold into slavery in distant pagan lands. Their tragical story has perished out of the records of the past.

The French children, under the leadership of Stephen of Cloyes, left Vendôme during the latter part of June, 1212. Thirty thousand, mostly boys, set out with the same demonstrations of joy and enthusiasm with which the German children had begun their march to Palestine. There were huzzas, songs of lofty cheer, anthems to God, and hopeful predictions of victory in the Holy Land. There were weeping mothers holding out in vain their beseeching hands to the departing children whom they should see no more. The procession, gay with banners and shouting with joy, passed down the Loire and so journeyed toward Marseilles.

Their route was not beset by the same hardships that had broken the ranks of the German children. There were no Alps for them to scale; no mountain torrents to chill their young blood. But the summer of 1212 was one of severe drought in France. The fields were parched, the streams were dry, and food was hard to get.

Nevertheless, the bulk of Stephen's army passed on undismayed. Stephen assumed the airs of a young king. He rode in a chariot adorned with gorgeous trappings, and surrounded himself with an armed body-guard. He was luxuriously clad, and his person was held so sacred that a touch from him was a priceless boon. His deluded followers paid him divine honors; when he spoke, they thronged about his chariot in such numbers that many of the weaker boys were trampled to death. He seems to have passed from a deluded victim of priestcraft into a wily, selfish impostor.

The terrible heat prostrated many. Their corpses strewed the way; and it is said that the country through which they passed was afflicted by the scourge their mortality inflicted. Barefoot, emaciated, and greatly reduced in numbers, the army reached Marseilles. Stephen's authority was gone, the crowd having long since refused to own him as their chief. They reached the sea at last, a demoralized and disorganized rabble.

Here the sight of the Mediterranean revived them, and they waited for the Lord of Hosts to open a path for them. In vain! Days and weeks passed and no relief came. The citizens of Marseilles grew weary of feeding them; and their prospects of reaching the Holy Land daily darkened. Thousands sought homes in the city or in the country round. Groups straggled off homeward, and a remnant only remained to wait.

Two merchants of Marseilles, when the number of the children was reduced to about five thousand, offered to carry them to the Holy Land. The offer was gladly accepted; and in seven small vessels the joyful young crusaders finally set sail. Two of these craft were cast on the rocky shores of the Isle of Falcons, a small island in the Mediterranean. All on board perished miserably, their comrades looking on in horror while the cruel sea swallowed up their forms forever.

The rest of the fleet sailed away. Their banners disappeared down the horizon, and for eighteen years they were lost to the world that had known them as the young crusaders. In due time, there came tidings—at first uncertain, then more positive—of the hapless boys. The two merchants of Marseilles—Porcus and Ferreus—were disguised slave-dealers; the young crusaders were carried to Bujehia, an Algerine port, and there sold into pagan slavery. A few were taken to Alexandria, where they were bought by dealers from Bagdad, Cairo, and other Moslem cities. The children who had been born on the Seine, the Loire, or in the lovely valleys of Southern France, wore their lives away in the hot fields of Syria, Mesopotamia and Egypt. Cruel Algerines drove to their daily tasks the tender young ones of mothers who sorrowed in

distant homes for the children whose fate was unknown, and on whose dear faces they should look no more.

Centuries have gone since this strange crusade was preached. Kings and mighty men who then filled a great space in the world have gone their way. The little actors in this moving drama have long since become dust. Their burial-places, scattered from Central Europe to farther Asia, are unknown. In the crowded chapters of the history of humanity this doleful tragedy is but a little . . .t.

Even we who read it wonder vaguely at the marvelous religious enthusiasm that awakened this mass of children; and we close the story with a sigh.

But God has doubtless wrought out some lesson from these pathetic events. So soon this dream was over; so soon this pitiful struggle was ended; so rapidly into the dim past melted the story of the Children's Crusade—who shall tell why it was ever begun so strangely, or why it ended in such a cloud of woe?

## SANTA CLAUS AND HIS MEN.

BY C. A. LYNDE.



A CURIOUS place is Old Santa Claus' den,  
All stor'd full of treasures; where queer little men,  
No larger than drumsticks, yet active and bright,  
Are busily working from morning till night.

These queer little fellows, these workmen so small,  
All answer with pleasure Old Santa Claus' call  
For "Fifty more bonbons, one hundred more toys!  
More names on my list of good girls and good  
boys!"

"Here, merrily ho!" he gleefully cries;  
"My sled is all ready—make haste, the time flies!

My reindeer are prancing and pawing the snow;  
Make haste there, make haste, we're impatient to go!"

Soon the bundles are packed with the greatest of care,  
Then off spring the reindeer, on! on! thro' the air,  
Till they stop at some home, where snug in their bed  
Sleep Cora and Mabel, or Willie and Fred.

When the children awake at dawn's early light,  
And steal from their beds, how they'll scream with  
delight  
On beholding their stockings, they hung on the wall,  
With treasures o'erflowing, and something for all.