



The Complete History of the Crusades [Volume I of III] (Illustrated)

Joseph Michaud

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THE HISTORY of the middle ages presents no spectacle more imposing than the Crusades, in which are to be seen the nations of Asia and of Europe armed against each other, two religions contending for superiority, and disputing the empire of the world. After having been several times threatened by the Muslims, and a long time exposed to their invasions, all at once the West arouses itself, and appears, according to the expression of a Greek historian, to tear itself from its foundation, in order to precipitate itself upon Asia. All nations abandon their interests and their rivalries, and see upon the face of the earth but one single country worthy of the ambition of conquerors. One would believe that there no longer exists in the universe any other city but Jerusalem, or any other habitable spot of earth but that which contains the tomb of Jesus Christ. All the roads which lead to the holy city are deluged with blood, and present nothing but the scattered spoils and wrecks of empires.

In this general confusion we may contemplate the sublimest virtues mixed with all the disorders of the wildest passions. The Christian soldiers have at the same time to contend against famine, the influence of climate, and enemies the most formidable; in the greatest dangers, in the midst of their successes and their constant discords, nothing can exhaust either their perseverance or their resignation. After four years of fatigue, of miseries, and of victories, Jerusalem is taken by the Crusaders; but as their conquests are not the work of wisdom and prudence, but the fruit of blind enthusiasm and ill-directed heroism, they create nothing but a transient power.

The banner of the cross soon passes from the hands of Godfrey de Bouillon into those of his weak and imbecile successors. Jerusalem, now a Christian city, is obliged again to apply for succour to the West. At the voice of St. Bernard, the Christians take arms. Conducted by an emperor of Germany and a king of France, they fly to the defence of the Holy Land; but they have no longer great captains among them; they have none of the magnanimity or heroic resignation of their fathers. Asia, which beholds their coming without terror, already presents a new spectacle. The disciples of Mahomet awaken from their apathy; they are at once seized with a frenzy equal to that which had armed their enemies; they oppose enthusiasm to enthusiasm, fanaticism to fanaticism, and in their turn burn with a desire to shed their blood in a religious war...

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