

INTRODUCTION

PRELIMINARIES

POWERFUL and rich as English literature is, it has little to place in line against the superb array of French memoirs. Englishmen enough have done great things, or taken part in the doing of them, or seen them done; but only a scanty few have been moved to write—even fewer to write with any approach to style-of what they had done and seen. Among the French it has been otherwise. The French statesman, or leader, his life's greater battle being fought, has more often betaken himself to his pen, either—to use Guizot's image for the purpose of fighting the old fights once more, with that weapon, in the smaller arena of letters, or simply for pure indulgence in the pleasures of memory. Villehardouin, Toinville-I exclude Froissart, beautiful as his work is, because he was a chronicler pure and simple and not an actor in the world's affairs-Commines, Sully, Retz, the "Grande Mademoiselle," Saint-Simon, Chateaubriand, Guizot,-here is a fine list of examples.

Of these French memoirs, the Memoirs of Villehardouin and Toinville, here reproduced in an English form, are certainly not the least interesting. They are the first in date, those of Villehardouin having been written, probably, in the days of our King John, early in the thirteenth century; while those of Joinville were completed, about a century later, in October 1309, shortly after our Edward II. had begun to reign. Both are monuments of the French language, and of French prose, at an early stage of development—giant lispings, as one may say. Both are written by eye-witnesses who had taken an important part, in the case of Villehardouin a very important part, in what they describe. Both deal with stirring episodes in one of the most stirring chapters in human history, the chapter that tells how, for some three centuries, Christendom put forth its power to capture, and again recapture,

* 333

"Those holy fields
Over whose acres walked those blessed feet
Which, fourteen hundred years ago, were nailed,
For our advantage, on the bitter cross." 1

and both serve to illustrate the varied motives that went to the initiation and maintenance of that great movement.

VILLEHARDOUIN

VILLEHARDOUIN'S story opens with the closing years of the twelfth century. In those years, as he tells, Fulk of Neuilly, near Paris, a priest well known for his holiness and zeal, began to preach a new Crusade; and Fulk's words, so men thought, were confirmed by many signs and miracles; and even apart from such supernatural aid, it is not difficult, I think, to conjecture wherein lay the force of his appeal or to imagine its nature. But while he was descanting on the necessity for another attempt to recover the Holy, Land, and setting forth the glories and spiritual advantages of the proposed adventure, did he ever dwell at all, one wonders, on the story of the Crusades that had already been undertaken? Did he unfold for his hearers that tragic and terrible scroll in the history of men-a scroll on which are recorded in strange, intermingled, fantastic characters, tales of saintly heroism, and fraud, and greed, and cruelty, and wrong-of sufferings at which one sickens, and foul deeds at which one sickens more, and acts of devotion and high courage that have found their place among the heirlooms and glories of mankind?

Did he tell them of the First Crusade—tell them how, a little more than a century before, the heart of Peter the Hermit had been moved to fiery indignation at the indignities offered to pilgrims at the sacred shrines, and he had made all Christendom resound to his angry eloquence; how at the Council of Clermont, in 1095, Pope Urban II. had re-echoed the hermit's cry; how the nations had responded to the call to arms in so holy a cause, the noble selling or mortgaging his land, the labourer abandoning his plough, the woman her hearth and distaff, the very children forsaking their play; how a great wave of humanity had thence been set rolling eastward—a wave of such mighty volume, and so impelled

The first part of King Henry IV., Act I. Sc. I.

by fierce enthusiasm, that, notwithstanding every hindrance, dissension within, utter disorganisation, misrule, famine, plague, slaughter, wholesale desertions, treachery on every side, wild fanatical hostility—notwithstanding all this, it had yet rolled right across Europe, rolled on across the deserts and defiles of Asia Minor, and swept the infidel from Jerusalem and the fastnesses of Judæa? Did Fulk of Neuilly, one wonders, tell his hearers the story of that First Crusade, which, for all its miseries and horrors, accomplished the mission on which it started, and placed its great and saintly leader, Godfrey of Bouillon on the throne of Jerusalem, and founded a Christian kingdom in the Holy Land? (1090).

Did he tell them the story of the Second Crusade? That was the Crusade preached by one of very different mould from Peter the Hermit, by one who was in many ways the master-spirit of his time, St. Bernard. For to St. Bernard it seemed a scandal and intolerable that the Christian kingdom of Judæa, prayed for with so many prayers, purchased with so much blood, should be dissolved. He held it as not to be borne that the place where our Lord had been cradled in the manger, the fields where He had taught, the hill where He had died for men, the sepulchre in which He had lain, should fall once more into the unholy possession of the infidel. And yet, ere fifty years had passed since the taking of Jerusalem, this seemed an approaching consummation, so weakened was the new kingdom by internal dissension, so fiercely attacked from without. Already the Moslem were prevailing on every side. The important position of Edessa had fallen into their hands. So St. Bernard came to the rescue. By his paramount personal influence, he induced Lewis VII. of France, and Conrad of Germany to take the cross. Again there was a march across Europe; again treachery on the part of the Greek Emperor at Constantinople; again most terrible slaughter in Asia Minor; again unheard-of sufferings; again folly, ineptitude, treachery. But not again the old ultimate success. This time the great human wave, though it did indeed reach Jerusalem, yet reached it spent and broken. Edessa was not retaken. Damascus was besieged, only to show the utter want of unity among the Crusaders. Conrad returned to Germany. Lewis, a year later, returned to France (1149); and of the Second Crusade there remained small immediate trace, save, in France and Germany, depopulated hamlets, and homes made desolate, and bones

bleaching in the far Syrian deserts.

Could Fulk have turned, in the retrospect, with better heart to the Third Crusade?-Somewhat unquestionably. That Third Crusade is the one in which we Englishmen have most interest, for its central figure is our lion-hearted king. Richard. And it is, probably, the Crusade of which the main incidents are best known to the English reader, for they have been evoked from the past, and made, as it were, to reenact themselves before us, by the magic of Sir Walter Scott. What boy has not read the Talisman? And so it will not be necessary for me to dwell at length on the history of that Crusade: the rivalries of Richard and Philip Augustus; the siege and surrender of Acre; the return of Philip Augustus to France; the bitter feud with the Duke of Austria; the superb daring and personal prowess of Richard; the abortive march on Jerusalem-which must have been retaken save for the insane rivalries in the Christian host; the interchange of courtesies with the chivalrous Saladin; the abandonment of the Crusade; the return of the English king westward. and his imprisonment in an Austrian dungeon (1192).

Not a story of success, most certainly. Richard left the Holy Land pretty well where he found it. His object in going thither had been the recovery of Jerusalem, which, in 1187, after being nearly ninety years in Christian hands, had fallen a prey to Saladin. And that object was as far as ever from attainment. But still there rested about the Third Crusade a glamour of courage and heroic deeds, so that when scarce nine years after its conclusion, Fulk went about preaching new efforts for the expulsion of the Saracens, he may possibly have sought to raise the courage of his warlike hearers by dwelling on the doughty deeds of Richard and his

knights.

Otherwise, if he referred to the past at all—for the latest German expedition of 1196-1197 had just come to an inglorious close,—his message can scarcely have been one of confidence as he addressed the nobles and lesser men assembled at Ecri, towards the end of November 1199, to take part in the great tournament instituted by Thibaut III., Count of Champagne. No, the past was against them. It spoke little of success, and much of misery, disorganisation, disaster; while as to the future, if Fulk and his hearers had

seen into that, one doubts if they could have been moved to much enthusiasm. Whatever admixture of worldly motives there may have been, the Fourth Crusade was vehemently advocated by Pope Innocent III., proclaimed by Fulk, joined by multitudes of devout pilgrims, for the express purpose of recapturing Jerusalem, and driving the heathen out of Palestine. But it never reached Palestine at all. It did far less than nothing towards the recovery of the Holy City. It delivered its blow with immense force and shattering effect upon a Christian, not a Moslem, state. It contributed not a little, in ultimate result, to break down Europe's barrier against the Turk. Thus, from the Crusading point of view, it was a gigantic failure; and, as such, denounced again and yet again by the great Pope who had done so much to give it life.

How did this come about? What were the real influences that led the Fourth Crusade to change its objective from Terusalem to Constantinople? The question has been many times debated. It is, as one may almost say, one of the stock questions of history; and I can scarcely altogether give it the go-by here—as I should like to do—because in that question is involved the more personal question of Villehardouin's own good faith as a historian. If there were wire-pullers at work, almost from the beginning, who laboured to deflect the movement to their own ends; if the Venetians throughout played a double game,1 and betrayed the Christian cause to the Saracens, then it is necessary, before we accept him altogether as a witness of truth, to inquire why he makes no mention of the Marquis of Montferrat's intrigues, or the Republic's duplicity. Did he write in ignorance? or did he, while possessing full knowledge, banish ugly facts from his narrative, and deliberately constitute himself, as has been said, the "official apologist" of the Crusade?

For, as he tells the story, all is simplicity itself. There is scarcely anything to explain. The Crusade has a purely religious origin: "Many took the cross because the indulgences were so great." Villehardouin himself, and his five brother delegates from the great lords assembled in parliament at Compiègne, go to Venice, and engage a fleet to take

^{1&}quot; The unchristian cupidity of the banausically-minded Republic of St. Mark," is the quaint description given by Pope Innocent's latest biographer. Innocent the Great, by C. H. C. Pirie-Gordon, 1907.

the host of the pilgrims "oversea"—an ambiguous term which meant Syria for the uninitiated, but "Babylon" or Cairo for the Venetian Council—" because it was in Babylon, rather than in any other land, that the Turks could best be destroyed." Then comes the death of Count Thibaut of Champagne, who would have been the natural leader of the Crusade, and the selection, in his stead, of the Marquis of Montferrat, "a right worthy man, and one of the most highly esteemed that were then alive." Afterwards the pilgrims begin to assemble in Venice; but owing to numerous defections, their number is so reduced that the stipulated passage money is not forthcoming, and the Venetians naturally refuse to move. The blame, up to this point, lies entirely with the pilgrims who had failed to keep their tryst. Meanwhile, what is to be done? Some, who in their heart of hearts wish not well to the cause, would break up the host and return to their own land. Others, who are better affected, would proceed at all hazards. Then the Doge proposes a compromise. If, says he, addressing his own people, we insist upon our pound of flesh, we can, no doubt, claim to keep the moneys already received, as some consideration for our great outlay; but, so doing, we shall be greatly blamed throughout Christendom. Let us rather agree to forego the unpaid balance and carry out our agreement, provided the pilgrims, on their part, will help us to recapture Zara, on the Adriatic, of which we have been wrongfully dispossessed by the King of Hungary. To this the Venetians consent, and likewise the Crusaders, notwithstanding the remonstrances of the evil-disposed party aforesaid. So the blind old Doge assumes the cross, with great solemnity, in the Church of St. Mark, and many Venetians assume it too, and all is got ready for departure.

Then, and not till then, do we get any hint of an attack on the Greek empire. "Now listen," says Villehardouin, "to one of the greatest marvels and greatest adventures that ever you heard tell of," and he proceeds to narrate how the young Greek prince Alexius, having escaped from the hands of that wicked usurper, his uncle, and being at Verona on the way to the court of his brother-in-law, "Philip of Germany," makes overtures to the Crusaders, and how the latter are not unprepared to help him to recover his father's throne, provided he in turn will help them to re-conquer Jerusalem.

Whereupon envoys are sent to accompany the youth into Germany, for further negotiation with Philip, and the host, Crusaders and Venetians together, set sail for their attack on

Christian Zara.

And here for the first time Villehardouin makes mention of the religious objection to the course that the Crusade is taking. The inhabitants of Zara are prepared to capitulate, but are dissuaded by the party which, according to Villehardouin, were anxious to break up the host, and while the matter is under discussion, the abbot of Vaux, of the order of the Cistercians, rises in his place and says, "Lords, on behalf of the Apostle of Rome, I forbid you to attack this city, for it is a Christian city, and you are pilgrims." Nevertheless the Doge insists that the Crusaders shall fulfil their contract, and Zara is besieged and taken.

While the host is waiting, after the capture, they are joined by the envoys from Philip, and from Philip's brother-in-law, Alexius, the son of the deposed Emperor of Constantinople. These envoys bring definite and very advantageous proposals. The Crusaders are to dispossess the treacherous and wicked emperor, also called Alexius, and reinstate the deposed Isaac; and in return for this great service, Alexius the younger promises, "in the very first place." that the Greek empire shall be brought back into obedience to Rome, and then-seeing that the pilgrims are poor-that they shall receive 200,000 marks of silver, and provisions for small and great, and further that substantial help shall be afforded towards the conquest of the "land of Babylon,"

The hook was well baited. The reunion of Christendom, gold and stores in plenty, active co-operation from the near vantage ground of Constantinople in the dispossession of the infidel, a splendid adventure to be achieved-no wonder the Crusaders were tempted. Villehardouin himself never falters in his expressed conviction that the course proposed was the right course, that he and his companions did well in following, at this juncture, the fortunes of the younger Alexius. Nevertheless it is clear, even from his narrative, that a great, almost overwhelming, party in the host were unconvinced and bitterly opposed to the deflection of the Crusade. Hotly was the question debated. The laymen were divided. The clergy, even of the same religious order, were at bitter strife. When it came to the ratification of the convention with Alexius, only twelve French lords could be induced to swear. Thereafter came defection on defection—the deserters, as Villehardouin is always careful to note, not without a certain complacency, coming mainly to evil ends. "Now be it known to you, lords," says he, "that if God had not loved that host, it could never have kept together, seeing how many there were who wished evil to it." Even the Pope's forgiveness for the attack on Zara, and his exhortation to the pilgrims to remain united, did not avail to prevent

further disintegration.

Nevertheless the host ultimately reaches Constantinople, routs the Greeks, who have no stomach for the fight, sends the usurping Emperor Alexius flying, reinstates the blinded Isaac, and seats the younger Alexius, by the side of Isaac, on the imperial throne. But naturally the position of Isaac and Alexius is precarious, and when the latter asks the Crusaders to delay their departure, the adverse party tries once more to obtain an immediate descent on Syria or Egypt. They are overborne. Soon, however, it becomes clear that Isaac and Alexius either cannot, or will not, fulful their promises. As a matter of fact Alexius has placed himself and his father in an impossible position, of which death, in cruel forms, is to be the outcome, and they become, in turn, the objects of attack, and their empire a field of plunder. Henceforward the die is cast. The Crusade ceases to be a Crusade, and becomes as purely an expedition of conquest as William's descent on England. Whatever may be their occasional qualms, Franks and Venetians have enough to do in the Greek Empire, without giving very much thought to Judæa.

But to all this there is another side. Thus, if we are to believe the chronicle 1 compiled in 1393, by order of Heredia, Grand Master of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem, Villehardouin first proposed the Crusade to his lord, the Count of Champagne, not on any specially religious grounds, but because, after the peace between the kings of France and Eng-

¹ Libro de los Fechos et Conquistas del Principado de la Morea, translated from Spanish into French by Alfred Morel-Fatio, and published at Geneva in 1885 for the Société de l'Orient Latin. See p. 1. I am bound, however, to say that this chronicle, which assigns to Villehardouin a very important part in the organisation of the Crusade, was compiled long after date, and seems clearly apocryphal in many of its details.

land, there were a great many idle men-at-arms about, whom it would be desirable to employ. So also Ernoul, a contemporary, after telling how the barons of France, who had sided with Richard against Philip Augustus, cast off their armour at the tournament at Ecri, and ran to take the cross, adds: "There are certain persons who say that they thus took the cross for fear of the King of France, and so that he might not

punish them because they had sided against him."1

This, however, is relatively unimportant. Mixed motives may at once be conceded as probable and natural. What is of greater significance is the attitude of the Venetians and the question of their good faith. Villehardouin here hints no doubt. According to him, the Republic made a bargain to provide freight and food for an expedition to the Holy Land or to "Babylon," and provided both amply, and it was only on the failure of the pilgrims to carry out their side of the bargain that the Venetians fell back on Zara. They were prepared to take the Crusade to its original destination. But the same Ernoul, from whom I have just quoted, tells another story. He relates how Saphardin, the brother of the deceased Saladin, hearing that the Crusaders had hired a fleet in Venice, sends envoys to the Venetians, with great gifts and promises of commercial advantage, and entreats them to "turn away the Christians," and how the Venetians accept the bribe, and use their influence accordingly; 2 while certain modern historians discover, or think they have discovered, that it was the Venetians who took the initiative in this act of treachery, and that after making the treaty with Villehardouin and his fellow delegates in 1201, they sent envoys to Saphardin and virtually gave the Crusaders away by a specific treaty-of which, however, the date, and with it the relevancy, has been contested.

So again, with regard to the evil influences at work within the host itself, certain historians have endeavoured to show that the misdirection of the Crusade was but an episode in the long struggle between Guelf and Ghibelline. For the Crusade was the pet child of Innocent III. It was the dearest object of his heart. It was to crown his pontificate. What more natural than that the Ghibelline, Philip of

¹ Chronique d'Ernoul et de Bernard le Trésorier, published by M. L. de Mas Latrie for the Société de l'histoire de France. Paris, 1871. See p. 337.

2 See ébid. pp. 345, 346, and 361, 362.

Swabia, the son of Barbarossa, himself just then lying under a solemn excommunication, should endeavour, by all the means in his power, to thwart the expedition, to turn it to his own ends—one of which was the conquest of Constantinople—for on Constantinople he had pretensions. Thus, according to this view, when Villehardouin suggested the Marquis of Montferrat for the leadership, he was, indirectly indeed, acting as the mouthpiece of Philip. And the Marquis, from the date of his election, did but become Philip's agent, and had in view only one object—an attack on the Greek emperor.¹ All his actions and movements are to be

¹See M. Riant's articles quoted below. The curious reader who would follow this controversy is referred to the following works among many others, French and German. I place them, as will be seen, in the chronological order of publication:—

Histoire de l'Isle de Chypre sous le Règne des Princes de la Maison de Lusignan, par M. L. de Mas Latrie, etc. Paris, 1861, Vol. I. pp. 161-165.—Geoffroy de Villehardouin, Conquête de Constantinople, etc., par M. Natalis de Wailly etc. Second edition Paris 1874 pp. 480-490.

Natalis de Wailly, etc. Second edition, Paris, 1874, pp. 429-439.

Up to this point only the conduct of Venice is in question. With the following enters as protagonist Philip of Swabia, and we are asked to consider the part which he took in deflecting the Crusade from Egypt or the Holy Land to Constantinople, and the action taken, under his influence, by the Marquis Boniface of Montferrat.

Innocent III., Philippe de Swabe et Boniface de Montferrat. Examen des Causes qui modifièrent au détriment de l'Empire Grec, le plan primitif de la 4e Croisade, published in Revue des Questions Historiques. Vol.

XVII., April 1875, pp. 321-374, and Vol. XVIII., July 1875, pp. 5-75. Signed, Comte Riant.

These two articles contain an elaborate and most learned indictment against Philip of Swabia and the Marquis of Montferrat, and, in a minor degree, against Villehardouin, as their accomplice and apologist. Comte Riant is most careful in giving reference to chapter and verse to support his conclusions, and so enable the student to verify and control, and—on occasion—to dissent.

A short note, signed M. de Wailly, on the above articles of Comte Riant, expressing dissent. Revue des Questions Historiques, Vol. XVIII.,

October 1875, pp. 578 and 579 (not p. 576 as stated in index).

Quatrième Croisade. La diversion sur Zara et Constantinople, par Jules Tessier, professeur à la faculté des lettres de Caen. Paris, 1884. In this volume, with an equal learning, M. Tessier contests the position taken up by M. Riant, and defends Philip of Swabia and Venice.

The Fall of Constantinople, by Edwin Pears. London 1885.

The Fall of Constantinople, by Edwin Pears. London, 1885.
The Notice, extending to 300 pages in Vol. II. of M. Emile Bouchet's
Geoffroi de Villehardouin. La Conquête de Constantinople, texte et
traduction nouvelle, avec notice, notes, et glossaire, par Emile Bouchet,

Paris, 1891.

M. Bouchet mainly accepts Comte Riant's facts and conclusions with regard to Philip and Venice, but exonerates Villehardouin, and defends him from the charge of having constituted himself the official apologist of the Crusade—pp. 289-297 and pp. 308, 309. M. Bouchet's manner is rather that of the historical narrator than of the erudite dissertator, and his notes are few. In this he differs from M. Riant and M. Tessier.

explained on the grounds that he cared nothing about Teru-

salem, and very much about Constantinople.

To go at length into all the pros and cons of this controversy, would take, not the comparatively short space allotted to an introduction, but a very considerable volume. And, indeed, the latest historian who has dealt with the subject, the very learned M. Luchaire, of the French Institute,1 declares that, on the available data, the questions involved are insoluble. Having placed the two views before the reader. I shall not therefore go into the matter further here. beyond saying that after a great deal of reading, and research. I have come to the conclusion, Firstly, that the Venetians were not as bad as they have been painted. They were a commercial people, and they had made a bargain, and they kept to it. The Crusaders did not. To expect the Venetians, for the good of the cause, to forego repayment for the large sums expended on a superb fleet and what must have been, temporarily at least, a great disturbance of their commerce, is absurd. Why should the main expense of the expedition fall on them? As to the treacherous arrangements with the Saracens, they seem to me not proven. Therefore I hold myself justified in asking the reader to look, without a smile of sarcasm and incredulity, at the great scene in which Dandolo, the grand old Doge, blind and bearing gallantly his ninety years, goes up into the reading-desk of St. Mark, and there, before all the people-who wept seeing him-places the sign of the cross in his bonnet. Surely his bearing in council, and afterwards in battle, was not that of a vulpine old impostor.

Secondly, I own to very great doubts as to the elaborate Machiavellian schemes of Philip of Swabia, and the Marquis of Montferrat, and the after-participation therein, to a greater or less degree, of the leaders of the Crusade. Webspinning so successful would imply gifts of foresight verging on prophesy. Let us "look at things more simply," as M. Luchaire says. And disbelieving, to a very great extent, in

M. Luchaire, as I have noted in the text (1907) declares the questions

raised to be insoluble on the available data.

The matter is referred to, but with no additional evidence or further discussion, in Sir Rennell Rodd's The Principalities of Achaia and the Chronicles of Morea, 1907, Chap. I, and Mr. Pirie-Gordon's Innocent the Great, an Essay on his Life and Times, 1907, Chap. IV.

1 Innocent III.: La Question d'Orient. 1907. See pp. 85, 86, 91, and 97

the plot, I am bound to exonerate Villehardouin from the charge of endeavouring to disguise its existence. Nay, I go further. What we see as the past was to Villehardouin the present and the future. We know that the Crusade came to nothing, ultimately "fizzled out," as one may say. But Villehardouin, looking forward from day to day, may quite honestly have believed that the course he consistently advocated was the course best calculated, all the circumstances being given, to ensure success. Shut up in the island of St. Nicholas, near Venice, without the necessary means for advance or retreat, or even for the provision of daily subsistence, the Crusading host was in helpless case. The advance on Zara had no alternative. Afterwards, leaders and men were without the sinews of war. When Alexius came with his definite proposals, one cannot wonder that men of strong political instinct, like our hero, should have thought that the best coign of vantage for an attack on Jerusalem, was Constantinople. The ignorant commonalty were for a direct descent on the Holy Land. The wiser chiefs would have preferred to first break the power of the Saracens in Egypt. The politicians of still larger outlook might naturally hold that with the Greek empire at their back, and with coffers full of Greek gold, they had the best chance of re-establishing the Christian kingdom of Jerusalem.

Nay, shall I go further still? The Franks defeated the Greeks with ease, defeated them as Pizarro and Cortes defeated the Peruvians and Mexicans, as Clive defeated the armies of India. What if they had not only conquered Roumania, but had also revivified the Greek empire; if, instead of giving themselves to the greed, and rapine, and unstatesmanlike oppression, which Villehardouin deplored, and so losing within sixty years (1261) what they had held unworthily-what if, instead of this, they had administered wisely and well, had mingled in blood and interest with the conquered, had breathed with the breath of a new life over the dry bones of that dead race and nationality, had created a virile state at this specially important point of the world's surface, and so barred the way against the entrance of the Turk into Europe? When the Frank fleet set sail from Venice, these things were on the knees of the gods. Should we have been misdoubting Villehardouin if they had come to

pass?

And having said so much for Villehardouin's good faith and essential political honesty, one is the more free to admire the force and effectiveness of the man. What was his exact age at the date of the tournament at Ecri (November 1199), is not known. Probably he was then about forty, and in the fulness of his strength, and, as one may fairly conjecture, well-knit, and possessing a frame fitted to endure hardship and fatigue. Even if we regard as doubtful the statement of Heredia's chronicler, that it was he who first proposed the Crusade to Count Thibaut, 1 yet it is clear that, from the very beginning, he took a leading part in the enterprise, and that, as one may conclude, on purely personal grounds, for the Villehardouins were of no imposing noblesse. Thus he is chosen by the assembled chiefs as one of the six envoys sent to Venice to negotiate for the transport of the host; and it is he who stands forth as spokesman for the Crusaders in the first memorable assembly at St. Mark's. When Count Thibaut dies, he seems to take the most active part in the choice of a successor, and proposes the leader ultimately nominated. When, afterwards, the pilgrims begin to avoid Venice, and travel eastwards by other routes, he is one of the two delegates despatched to bring them to a better mind, succeeding, to some extent, by "comfort and prayers." To him is entrusted the task of explaining to the restored Emperor Isaac what are the conditions on which the Crusaders have consented to come to his help at Constantinople. Again he is selected for the perilous office of bearing to the Emperors Isaac and Alexius, in full court, the haughty defiance of the host. He is selected once more for the particularly delicate mission of reconciling the Marquis of Montferrat with the Emperor Baldwin, and he is afterwards deputed to bring the Marquis to Constantinople. Thus we see him taking a prominent part wherever there is a task of difficulty or danger to be undertaken; and finally, in one of the darkest, direst hours of the expedition, he stands forth heroically, and masters circumstance. The Crusaders, contrary to all preconcerted plans, have left their ranks and followed the lightly-armed Comans into the field, whereupon the Comans attack in turn, and cut the Crusaders to pieces, killing Count Lewis of Blois, and taking the Emperor Baldwin prisoner. A broken remnant of the host comes flying

1 See ante, p. xvi.

into the camp. "When he sees this, Geoffry, the Marshal of Champagne, who is keeping guard before one of the gates of the city, issues forth from the camp as quickly as he can, and with all his men, and sends word to Manasses of the Isle, who is keeping another gate, to follow." One can almost see it all, as he tells the story: the advance in serried ranks, rapid but in strict order, and with all the pomp of war-à grande allure, -and the long line of mailed riders forming across the plain; the fugitives in full flight, for the most part too panicstricken to stop short of the camp itself, but those of better heart staying to strengthen the immovable breakwater of men. Towards that breakwater, but still keeping a respectful distance, surges the scattered host of Comans, Wallachians, Greeks, who do such mischief as they can with bows and arrows. It was between nones and vespers, as Villehardouin tells us, that the rout was stayed. It is not till nightfall that the enemy retire. Then, under cover of night, and in council with the Doge, he leads off the beaten remnant of the host, leaving, as he records with just pride, not one wounded man behind-and effects a masterly retreat to the sea and safety.

A man, evidently like Scott's William of Deloraine, "good at need "-a man trusted of all and trustworthy-honoured by the Doge, honoured by the Emperor Baldwin, honoured and beloved by the Marquis of Montferrat. Nor should it be imagined, because this is the impression left by a study of the chronicle, that Villehardouin's method of telling the story of the Crusade has in it anything of personal boastfulness or vainglory. When he speaks of himself, in the course of his narrative, he does so quite simply, and just as he speaks of others. There is no attempt to magnify his own deeds or influence. If he has taken part in any adventure or deliberation, he mentions the fact without false modesty, but does not dwell upon it unduly. And, indeed, as I read the man's character, a certain honourable straightforwardness seems to me one of its most important traits. He is a religious man, no doubt. The purely religious side of the Crusade has its influence upon him. He is not unaffected by the greatness of the pardon offered by the Pope. He believes that the expedition is righteous, and that God approves of it. He holds that God looks with a favouring eye upon all who are doing their best for its furtherance. "Listen," he cries after

some great deliverance, "how great are the miracles of our Lord whenever it is his pleasure to perform them. . . . Well may we say that no man can harm those whom God favours." And he stands in no manner of doubt that the Divine justice will deal in a very exemplary manner with those who separate themselves from the host, and pursue their own paths to Palestine. But if he is a religious man, he is in no sense an enthusiast. He stands in marked contrast to such Crusaders as Godfrey of Bouillon and St. Lewis. The worldly side of the whole thing-its policy and business, and fighting and conquests—these are very habitually present to his thoughts. And withal, as I have said—and notwithstanding the doubts referred to in the earlier pages of this introduction—there is a ring about him of honesty and sincerity. His utterances are such as may be counted honourable to all time. He never forbears to inveigh against dishonesty, double-dealing, covetousness. It is not only as a politician, but as an upright man that he denounces the rapacious mishandling to which the Greeks are subjected.

Of such a man, as I repeat, one hesitates to believe that he lent himself to a long course of intrigue, and afterwards constituted himself the "official apologist" of what he knew to

be indefensible.

And as the man is, so is his book. When judging that book, it has to be borne in mind that it is the first work of importance and sustained dignity written in the French tongue. At the time that he dictated it, therefore, Villehardouin had no precedents to go by, no models to imitate. He was in all respects-language, narrator's art, style-a pioneer. And this being so, it marks him as a born writer, and a writer of a very high order, that his narration should be so lucid and distinct. He marshals his facts well, proceeds from point to point with order and method, brings important matters into due prominence, keeps accessories properly in the background. Nor, notwithstanding the usual sobriety of his method, is he incapable, on due occasion, of rendering the moral aspect of a scene, or even the physical aspect of what has passed before his eyes. In proof of this I may refer to the two great scenes in St. Mark's, to the account of the attack on Constantinople,1 to the story of the battle in which Baldwin was taken prisoner.1

¹ See pp. 7-8, 16-17, 37-44, and 94-96.

Still I admit that as a word-painter his powers are embryonic rather than fully developed—a fact which Sainte-Beuve, the great critic, accounts for by saving that "the descriptive style had not yet been invented." But here, I venture to think. Sainte-Beuve was nodding. For if Villehardouin himself depicts soberly, yet he had a contemporary and fellow-Crusader, Robert of Clari by name, who also wrote a chronicle, and Robert of Clari has left a description of the scene when the Crusading fleet set sail from Venice on the feast of St. Remigius, 1202, which is not wanting in picturesqueness and colour: "The Doge," he says, "had with him fifty galleys, all at his own charges. The galley in which he himself sailed was all vermilion, and there was a pavilion of red satin stretched above his head. And there were before him four trumpets of silver that trumpeted, and cymbals that made joy and merriment. And all the men of note, as well clerks as lay, and whether of small condition or great. made such joy at our departure, that never before had such joy been made, or so fine a fleet been seen. And then the pilgrims caused all the priests and clerks there present to get up into the castles of the ships, and sing the Veni Creator Spiritus, and all, both the great and the small folk, wept for great joy and happiness. . . . It seemed as if the whole sea swarmed with ants, and the ships burned on the water, and the water itself were aflame with the great joy that they had." 1

It was in colours like these that Turner saw Venice suffused when he painted such pictures as the Sun of Venice going out to sea. It was in terms almost identical that Shake-speare described Cleopatra's barge "burning" upon the Nile. Surely when Robert of Clari, a writer not otherwise comparable with Villehardouin, mixed such hues upon his palette, it cannot be said that the descriptive style was unborn. And if Villehardouin makes use of it but soberly, the reason is rather, I conceive, to be found in this, that his interest was but little concerned with the outward shows of things. He was a politician and soldier who had played an important part in the drama of history. What he cared to remember, in after days, was the deeds of the men who had played their parts with him, their passions and objects. Their dress, the

¹ The reader may compare this passage with Villehardouin's description of the same event, p. 19, or of the departure from Corfu, p. 29.