

STORIES FROM THE CRUSADES

BY
JANET HARVEY KELMAN

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STORIES FROM THE CRUSADES



**Wherever the battle was hottest, Richard seemed to spring
from the ground**

TO
KATHARINE AND BARBARA

THE HEROES OF THE CRUSADES

The stories in this book are of heroes who lived hundreds of years ago. They caught sight of a beautiful dream and lived and died to make it come true.

Their eagerness swept along with them not only men who had never dreamed the dream and who did not know for what end they fought, but bad men also who only wished to get what they could for themselves.

The Crusades are long past, yet to-day there are men who see visions of good and who wish to bring them down to earth. With them are others who fight selfishly as did Bohemond and Baldwin long ago. But there are still men like Francis, who carry goodwill with them, and great knights like Tancred and like Louis, who live to fight for the poor and the weak.

CHAPTER I

HOW PETER PREACHED OF JERUSALEM

Once upon a time there was an ugly little boy called Peter, who lived in his father's castle in France. He was a restless boy, and liked always to do or to hear something new. His home was very quiet, for his father was a great fighter, and was often away at the wars for months at a time.

But though one day was very like another in Peter's life when he was young, he used to hear tales of pilgrimage and of battle that made him long to be free to go out into the world himself.

The country round his home and in the other northern lands near it was bare and grey, and the towers and walls of the cities were gloomy, but the boy heard of other lands and other cities. He heard that in Byzantium, where the Greek Emperor had his palace, the houses were built of marble, and their walls were lined with gold, and that in the lands around it rich fruits and grain grew. He often heard of another city called Jerusalem, for many pilgrims went to it because it was at Jerusalem that Jesus Christ died. Hundreds of years before Peter was born, Helena, the mother of the Greek Emperor Constantine, found a cross which she thought must be the Cross on which Christ died. She was full of awe and wonder, and in order that all who served Christ might see the Cross, it was set up in Jerusalem on the spot where it was thought to have stood when Christ died upon it. Long after Constantine and his mother were dead, a king who did not serve Christ carried the Cross away from

Jerusalem. The Emperor who then reigned in Greece fought with this king for ten years before he could subdue him. At last he won the cross again, and with it lands and gold, but these gave him far less joy than the thought that the cross would again stand in Jerusalem. He kept part of it in his city of Byzantium; with the rest he went to Jerusalem. He was a great man and a proud man, but he was humble when he thought of the cross and of what it told of the death of Christ. So he took off his beautiful clothes, and with bare feet and wearing a plain robe he carried the cross up the street of Jerusalem, and set it once more within the church that had been built where Christ died.

When Peter was young, hundreds of pilgrims went to Jerusalem to worship at the foot of this cross. They did so for many reasons. Some did it because they loved the thought of Christ and wished to stand where He had stood, and to see the land in which He had lived. Others went because they thought it would make other people think them very good. They hoped to be great people when they came back to their homes again. But the largest number went because the Pope and the priests told them that those who went in poverty to the Holy City would be forgiven for all the wrong things they had done. Many a man who was very unhappy because he had killed some one by stealth, gave up all that he had and went with nothing except a staff to visit the cross.

These pilgrims were often very cruelly treated in Jerusalem, for men called Saracens who did not serve Christ lived and ruled there, and they made each pilgrim give them money before they would allow him into the city. They are sometimes called

'Moslems,' and they were followers of a prophet named Mahomet. They were cruel to the Christians who lived in Jerusalem, as well as to the pilgrims who came to it.

Once, when Hakem, who was called 'the mad Sultan,' ruled in Jerusalem, the streets of the city surged with an angry throng. The white robes of the soldiers of Hakem flashed out amongst the bright colours that were worn by men of other Moslem races. Every face was full of scorn and anger. Harsh voices cursed those who served Christ. Jews hid in corners and alleys that they might not suffer with the Christians, for them too the Moslems hated.

The Moslems call their churches mosques, and the reason of their great anger on this day was that they had found a dead dog lying in a mosque. They thought that this had done such harm to their mosque that they could not pray in it till they had made it pure again, and they were sure that a Christian had thrown the dog's body there in order to annoy them. The news spread through the town, and each moment the crowd grew larger and more fierce.

'Let us fall on the Christian dogs!' they shouted. 'Let us kill them without mercy!' 'Who are they that they should soil our temple?'

The Christians had gathered into one place in sorrow and in fear. They all wore clothes of dull dingy shades, because they were not allowed to wear beautiful colours nor white robes like Hakem's soldiers. Each of them wore a leather thong to show that the Moslems ruled over him. Their hearts were more gloomy than their robes. If they were all killed, the Christian

Church would have no one left in Jerusalem. They waited in terror. But the noise they heard was not what they had feared. A clear voice rang out. The man who spoke was one of themselves. His name was Olindo.

'Nothing could be a greater evil,' he said, 'than that the Church should perish. I will die for you and for our faith. Do not forget me nor my people.'

The others burst into tears, but though they were sad to think of Olindo's death, no one tried to stay him. He passed swiftly out from them, and met the Moslem leaders as they hurried on to kill the Christians.

'I alone am guilty of this deed,' said Olindo; and he had not time to say more, for he fell dead in the street, killed by the swords of those nearest to him.

At that time those who were called Christians were quarrelling with each other. There were two Churches. One was the Greek Church, the other was the Church of Rome. The Popes, who reigned in Rome, always wished to make the Greek Church obey them, so that there might be only one Christian Church. And when Peter lived it seemed that perhaps this dream of the Popes might come true. A fierce race of men called Turks had swept westward from the Great Wall of China. Everything had fallen before them except the faith of the Prophet whom the Moslems followed. It did not fall, because, instead of trying to fight it, the Turks took it for their own. It suited them well, because it taught that whoever died fighting for it, against those who did not obey Mahomet, would go straight to heaven. So instead of making slaves of the Moslems whom they had

defeated, the Turks joined their armies to their own, and led them against the Empire of Greece. That was why the Pope who lived then thought he might be able to unite Rome and Greece once more. Greece asked Rome to help her against the Turks, and Rome hoped that if she helped her so, then Greece would be willing to do what she wished afterwards.

And it was of these things that men who knew the world talked and thought when Peter was a boy. As he grew up, he longed to have a share in all the great things that were being done in the world, and in order to know about them he entered the home of the Bishop of Paris that he might be a priest, and so have time to read many books. But he soon found that he could not be happy while he only read about what other men had done. He yearned to do things himself. The bishop liked him well and wished to keep him with him, but the restless lad would not stay. He went to fight in Flanders, but it was only for a short time that war seemed gay and pleasant to him. He was made a prisoner, and he found a cell far more dull and dreary than his study in Paris.

Then he escaped from prison, and made a home of his own. There he and his wife Beatrice lived for a few years together, but soon she died and left Peter with three little children. Peter gave the care of the children to a friend and fled to a hermit's cell. It seemed to him that he had tried every kind of life in vain, and that nothing was left for him but to live alone and to think and pray till death came to him.

But Peter was neither old nor ill, and death was a long way off from him. The narrow cell became a prison to him, and he grew as restless as a lion in a cage. But he had vowed that he would

live the life of a hermit, and if death would not come to him to bring him freedom, there was only one way in which he could keep his vow and yet do things and take part in the life of the world. That way was to go on pilgrimage. As he thought of this, the old light flashed in his keen dark eyes.

'I too,' he said to himself, 'will walk barefoot where Christ has trod. My tears shall fall on His grave, and I will kneel before the cross.'

He set out on his journey, and after many risks and dangers he reached Jerusalem. Peter had seen many beautiful towns and rich valleys, and when he saw the bare rocky ground that led up to Jerusalem, he was amazed that Christ had died in so dreary a city.

'How strange,' thought he, 'that the Lord of All should have chosen this barren spot!' As he went from place to place in the city he was in great excitement. He made such vivid pictures in his mind of all that had happened there that the thought of it took away his breath, and he longed that he might die where such things had taken place. It was dreadful for him to see how those who cared not for the memory of Christ scorned and defiled the holy places, and robbed and ill-treated the pilgrims who asked only to be allowed to worship and to think in peace. He sought out the head of the Christian Church, whom men called the Patriarch of Jerusalem, and talked with him of what might be done to save the Holy City from the Moslems, and he told the Christians in Jerusalem that he would go away and bring the people of Europe to fight for the Holy City.

On the evening before Peter left Jerusalem he went into the church in which the cross stood, to pray. He was weary with talk and thought and with many visits to holy places, and he fell asleep. While he slept, he thought he saw Christ come to him and say:

‘Arise, Peter, do with courage that which thou hast said. I will be with thee.’

Peter rose from his knees in great joy. He left Jerusalem and went with haste to Rome. There the Pope listened to him gladly and gave him his blessing. He told him to go from town to town and from land to land, and to tell every one who would listen, of the sufferings of pilgrims and of the dishonour that was shown to the memory of Christ in the places where He had once walked.

This was a different kind of life from the one Peter had lived in the hermit’s cell. It was full of change and excitement, and it had in it the great hope that one day he would see Jerusalem in the hands of Christian armies, and pilgrims welcomed and honoured where they had suffered so much.

Peter was still ugly. He was small and ungainly, but he had piercing black eyes, and those who caught sight of them forgot to look at anything else. He was not fifty years old, but the hard life he had lived had turned his hair and beard white. He did not wear either hat or shoes. As he rode along on his mule, the long coarse folds of his robe flapped round his bare feet, and the cord that bound his waist dangled at his side. In his hands he carried a heavy crucifix.

When he stopped and began to speak, people thought he was some silly, worthless man, but before he had spoken many sentences they gathered close to him and listened with open eyes and mouths, for the ugly little man could make other men see the things he saw, and feel what he felt. Everywhere Peter made men and women think that the only thing that mattered in the whole world was to save Jerusalem from the Moslems.

The crowds of people who followed Peter soon grew as excited as he was himself. They thought that he was so holy, that if they touched him or pulled a hair from his mule's tail, they would be better and happier.

When Peter had told hundreds of people about Jerusalem, the Pope himself came to meet as many of them as could be gathered together to hear him. The city to which he asked them to come could not hold the crowds who came together from every side. It was winter, and bitterly cold, and knights and nobles, monks and workmen, camped in the icy fields round the town.

When the great day came, the Pope sat on a throne in the city square with Peter by his side. Peter told once more of Jerusalem and of what he had seen there; and when he was silent the Pope rose and promised that however wicked were any of those who heard him, yet if they would only now go to fight in the Holy War he would promise that no evil would ever come to them because of the wrong things they had done in the past, and that when they died they would go straight to heaven.

The people had been greatly excited by Peter's speech, and as they heard the Pope promise such wonderful things to all who

would fight for Jerusalem, they began to shout out, 'It is the will of God: it is the will of God.'

'It is the will of God,' answered the Pope. 'Let that be your battle-cry. And because ye seek to save the city of our Lord, let the cross be your sign. Wear it on your shoulders and on your breasts. With it, ye shall certainly be either victors or martyrs.'

Then nobles with their gay banners and flashing armour, and peasants in coarse dull-coloured tunics, crowded forward to take the red cross of war from the hands of the Pope.

After this, many others besides Peter went out to preach the Crusade, and all along the roads by which they went, there gathered groups of men, women, and children, each with the sign of the cross on shoulder or banner.

The knights and nobles who had taken the cross had many things to do ere they could leave their lands. They had to sell jewels and silver dishes that they might have money to pay for the food their followers would need on the journey and throughout the fighting. They had to find people in whose care they could leave children and castles. But many foolish folk who knew nothing at all of what it meant to go on foot to the Holy Land, or to fight the fierce Turkish soldiers, and who had nothing to leave behind, crowded round Peter and begged him to wait for no one, but to lead them at once to the Holy City. Peter knew nothing of war, and although he did know something of the danger of the journey, he did not think how much more hard it would be to find food for a thousand people than for one. He thought, too, that all those men whose eager faces looked up into his, were as much in earnest as he was

himself, and would be as willing to suffer and even to die. Besides all that, he was not at all patient himself. He wished to see the banner of the Cross floating from the walls of Jerusalem, and he wished to see it at once. He could hardly bear to think of the long march that must lie between him and victory, so it is no wonder that he would not wait for the armies of the nobles, but set off with a great unruly band of men who had not learned to fight nor even to obey!

Few of them ever reached the Holy Land. When Peter brought the handful that still followed him to Byzantium, where the Greek Emperor reigned, they behaved so badly that the Emperor was sorry that he had asked for help from Rome. He hated the thought of the armies of the Holy War, before any of the real warriors had come to his land.



Peter set off with an unruly band of men

CHAPTER II

HOW TANCRED FOUGHT UNDER THE BANNER OF THE CROSS

While Peter led these wild lawless men to Byzantium, the nobles who had vowed to fight in the Holy War were preparing to lead out the armies of the first Crusade. There were many brave knights ready to fight for Jerusalem. One of the bravest was Godfrey, who came from Germany. When he was at peace with those around him, he had all the charm of winning manners and of gentle voice, but in battle he was brave and dreadful, and as strong as a raging lion. Once he had fought for the Emperor of Germany against the Pope, and ever since that time he had been very unhappy, because the only thing he feared was the power of the Church. He was delighted when he heard of the preaching of Peter. To save [Pg 18]Jerusalem seemed to him a splendid thing, and then he thought that no harm would come to him because he had fought against the Pope, if he should be able to win the Holy City for Rome and for the Christian faith. Two of his brothers joined him, and many other lords and nobles came to set out with him for Jerusalem.

But all his followers were not men who had lived in courts. There were many workmen and peasants, and some wild men in shaggy clothes who came from the Scottish shores, and who found their way to his camp by making the sign of the cross with their fingers. Every one knew what that meant, and pointed out the way to the strangers.

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