

PLEASANT HOURS

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.....The Crusaders.....

BY THE EDITOR.

One of the most extraordinary phenomena in history was that strange movement of the Middle Ages, whereby, in the words of the Byzantine Princess, Anna Comnena, all Europe was precipitated on Asia. These religious wars united the nations of the West in a grand political league long before any similar union could otherwise have taken place. They also greatly improved, or, indeed, almost created, the military organization of Europe, and inspired and fostered the spirit of chivalry in her populations. They led to the abolition of serfdom, by the substitution of martial service instead of the abject vassalage to which the masses had been accustomed. By enforcing the so-called

TRUCE OF GOD

they prevented the pernicious practice of private warfare, and turned the arms of Christendom against the common foe. Vast multitudes were led to visit Italy, Constantinople, and the East—the seats of ancient learning, and the scenes of splendid opulence. Extended travel enlarged their knowledge of the geography, literature, natural history, and productions of foreign lands. In the East still lingered the remains of the science of the palmy days of the Caliphate. The rustic manners of the Crusaders became polished by their contact with the more refined Oriental races. To the British or German knight, who had never stirred farther from his ancestral castle than a boar hunt or a stag chase led him, what a wonder-land must Italy and the East have been, with their great cities, their marble palaces, porphyry pillars, and jasper domes!

THE CRUSADERS,

becoming acquainted with the luxuries of the Orient, discovered new wants, felt new desires, and brought home a knowledge of arts and elegances before unknown.

The result was seen in the greater splendour of the Western courts, in their more gorgeous pomp and ceremonial, and in the more refined taste in pleasure, dress, and ornaments. The miracles and treasures of ancient art and architecture in Greece and Italy, far more numerous than now, did much to create and develop a taste for the beautiful, and to enlarge the sphere of human enjoyment. The refining influence of the East and South have left their mark in every corner of Europe, from Gibraltar to Norway, from Ireland to Hungary, from crosses on the doors to the arabesque traceries in cathedrals and castles.

It is not wonderful that these great and stirring events, with their combined religious enthusiasm and military splendour, awoke the imagination of the poets. They gave a new impulse to thought, and a greater depth and strength to feeling. They inspired the muse of Tasso and of many a lesser bard, and supplied the theme of the great Christian epic,

"JERUSALEM DELIVERED."

The Crusaders, moreover, made several commercial settlements in the East, the trade of which survived their military occupation by the Latins. Thus a valuable commerce sprang up, which contributed greatly to enrich the resources, ameliorate the manners, and increase the comforts of the West.

But there were grave and serious evils resulting from the Crusades, which went far to counterbalance all these advantages. The lives and labours of millions

were lost to Europe, and buried beneath the sands of Syria. Many noble families became extinguished by the fortunes of war, or impoverished by the sale or mortgaging of their estates to furnish the means for military equipment. The influence of the Pope, as the organizer

intrigues of palaces have little to do with the great movements of humanity. Often the pettiness of human nature in high places is all the more conspicuous, on account of the very elevation of the platform on which the kingly puppets play their parts. The drama is sometimes amusing, sometimes trivial, and sometimes deeply tragical. One which seems to blend all three is the story of the nuptials of Charles VIII. of France and the Princess Anna of Brittany. It reads more like a romancer's story than like a piece of sober history. The Princess had been already betrothed to the Emperor Maximilian of Austria, and, indeed, was married by proxy, and had

or three provinces with their willing, or unwilling, subjects. The great artist, De Neuville, has given a graphic illustration of the strange nuptials, half hostile menace, half persuasive intrigue. An avenging Nemesis followed this strange marriage. A reckless and wicked life impaired the health of Charles VIII. He was ingloriously defeated in battle. At the early age of twenty-eight he knocked his head against a low arch in his palace and died. His children died in infancy; the lands for which he had perjured his soul, and even his ancestral inheritance, passed away from the house of Valois forever.

That great religious movement, the German Reformation, saved Cis-Alpine Europe from falling into the moral abyss which engulfed the Italian peninsula, during the Pontificate of Alexander VI. and his infamous successors. The most notable champion of the Papacy was the Emperor Charles V., the most potent monarch in Europe. One of the most dramatic episodes in history is the famous Diet of Worms, when Martin Luther stood before the assembled might of the empire.

The story of the

GREAT DUEL

between the intrepid Saxon monk and the puissant Emperor is too familiar to now occupy our time. The great moral forces of the age were with the Reformers. The very stars in their courses seemed to fight against the supporters of the Papacy. The following is the result of the prolonged conflict, as summarized by Dr. Ridpath:

"The two prodigious schemes of Emperor Charles, to restore the union of Christendom under the Pope, and to make himself secular head of Europe, had dropped into dust and ashes. A correct picture of the workings of the mind of this cold and calculating genius, as it turned in despair from the wreck of its dreams, would be one of the most instructive outlines of human ambition, folly and disappointment ever drawn for the contemplation of men. Seeing the Treaty of Augsburg, which guaranteed the Protestant liberties of Europe, an accomplished fact, the Emperor determined to abdicate. Precisely a month after the conclusion of the peace, he published an edict conferring on his son Philip II. the kingdom of the Netherlands. On the 15th of the following January he resigned to him also the crowns of Spain, Naples, and the Indies, then taking ship to the Spanish dominions, he left the world behind him, and as soon as possible sought refuge from the recollection of his own glory and vanished hopes, in the monastery of San Yuste. Here he passed the remaining two years of his life as a sort of

IMPERIAL MONK,

taking part with the brothers in their daily service, working in the garden, submitting to flagellation—the sometime lord of the world scourged on his naked shoulders in expiation for his sins—watching the growth of his trees, and occasionally corresponding with the dignitaries of the outside world.

"Sometimes he amused himself with trifles. He was something of a mechanic, and spent days and weeks in the attempt to regulate two clocks so that they should keep precisely the same time. 'What a fool I have been,' was his comment, 'I have spent all my life in trying to make men go together, and here I cannot succeed with even two pieces of dumb machinery.' As he felt his end approaching, he became possessed with the grotesque notion of witnessing his own funeral. He accordingly had all the preparations made for that event, and the ceremony carefully rehearsed, himself taking part, joining in the chant of the requiem, and having himself properly adjusted in the coffin. A short time afterwards, namely, on the 21st of September, 1558, the rehearsal became an actual drama, and the principal personage did not join in the requiem. For he had gone to that land where the voice of ambition can no more provoke to action,

"'Or flattery soothe the dull cold ear of death.'"



MEETING OF CHARLES VIII. AND ANNE OF BRITTANY—AFTER DE NEUVILLE.

of the Crusades and common father of Christendom, was greatly augmented. The opulence and corruption of the religious orders was increased by the reversion to their possession of many estates whose heirs had perished in the field. Vast numbers of Oriental relics, many of them spurious and absurd, became objects of idolatrous worship. Many corruptions of the Greek Church were imitated, many Syrian and Greek saints introduced into the calendar, and many Eastern legends and superstitions acquired currency.

THE MEDÆVAL HISTORY OF EUROPE

is chiefly that of kings, and courts, and camps. The great mass of the nation served but as the pawns with which monarchs played the game of war. The

assumed the title of Queen of the Romans; and the Princess Marguerite, daughter of Maximilian, was betrothed to Charles VIII., and actually wore the title of Queen of France.

At this juncture Charles VIII. "fell

POLITICALLY IN LOVE

with the heiress of Brittany," as Dr. Ridpath expresses it; that is, he fell in love with Brittany, advanced at the head of his army and besieged its princess at Rennes. He wooed her as the lion woos his bride, and straightway married her. He not only robbed Maximilian of his bride, but grossly insulted him by the public rejection of his daughter. But statecraft rendered an open rupture inexpedient, and the Emperor's wounded honour was saved by the cession of two