

early appeared. But the use of the ambiguous Latin term *miles* by the early Chroniclers, renders the exact period of its introduction uncertain. An exploit related by Vertot, which took place about this time, proves conclusively that the Normans had early imbibed its spirit. This exploit of Norman Knights was achieved in Italy; and, as at a later period Chivalry flourished in that country, it was then probably first made known to the Italians. Thus during the first century of its existence it steadily increased in extent and power by constant accessions of members to its ranks and frequent displays of heroic and benevolent deeds. It found, too, in the petty strifes of Feudal Barons, opportunities for vigorous action, thereby preserving itself from the evil that ever accompanies inactivity.

In the latter part of the eleventh century it became assimilated with the Crusades; it became susceptible in a greater degree to religious influence, while, as shown by individual exploits, it lost nothing of its romantic character. Now knights who had undergone the vows and ceremonies of Chivalry took upon themselves voluntary vows. These they signified by distinctive badges and sought to perform in foreign lands. Consequently when the great Chivalric leaders raised their banners in the cause of Christianity, an eager multitude of knights enlisted in their ranks. Thenceforth for the space of two centuries the Eastern World was the scene of illustrious deeds. Individual acts vied in glory with the achievements of entire armies. Often after the issue of eventful contests the advantages of the Crusaders appeared to consist rather of the result of personal prowess than of the bravery of a combined army. There are not wanting, however, in this period of its history, reports of crime of almost every species. This was not in any way the effect of the chivalric spirit; it, indeed, instilled into the hearts of men motives of noble and lofty deeds; but the vices of the age, which could never be wholly eradicated, combined with a new and peculiar fanaticism, wrought often within the institution itself, actions utterly incompatible with its principles.

The fall of Acre in the latter part of the thirteenth century terminated the last distinct Crusade. Chivalry was now free from the corrupting influences of the East. But a taint still clung to it; and there were even then in its vitality some of the causes of its final extinction. Transferred, however, to the scenes of its earlier conquests, it held aloof for a time from the acts which had endangered its fame, and entering its former field of action, returned, seemingly, to its original condition. In Spain the Moorish battles still exhibited the incongruous elements of the Crusades; but the long and romantic wars between England and France gave opportunity for the exercise of every Knightly virtue. Hence we find in their history accounts of a series of brilliant exploits. On every occasion courtesy and benevolence ennobled the character of the combatants; and the victor ever achieved a twofold conquest.

From the close of the fourteenth century it gradually and surely declined. If its advent had been sudden as the nature of circumstances required, its egress from the scenes of its achievements was in no way similar.