

IX

THE CHILDREN'S CRUSADE

For more than a hundred years the object of the crusade, the recovery of the Holy Land, had inspired the warriors of western Europe to undertake expeditions of great danger and great cost. From the outset, however, motives were mixed. Many crusaders showed a gross indifference to the purpose of the crusade whenever temptation beckoned, as it did often enough. Even after the fall of Jerusalem to Saladin in 1187, crusading leaders continued to put self-interest ahead of coöperation, and the spectacle of their rivalry was a constant discouragement. The recent diversion of the Fourth Crusade, and the wholesale confiscations of lands in the Midi

The history of the Children's Crusade can be told only from scattered notices in several French, German and Italian chronicles, some more authoritative than others. They have not always been handled with sufficient care, with the result that late and exaggerated accounts, such as that later inserted in the *Chronica majora* of Matthew Paris, have often dominated the story because of their colorful details. A critical assessment of the sources, and of some of the older secondary literature, may be found in Dana C. Munro, "The Children's Crusade," *AHR*, XIX (1913-1914), 516-524, and in Joseph E. Hansbery, "The Children's Crusade," *The Catholic Historical Review*, XXIV (1938), 30-38. Where the present writer ventures to differ with either of these authors is sufficiently indicated below.

In addition to the articles by Munro and Hansbery, the brief account by Reinhold Röhrich, "Der Kinderkreuzzug," *Historische Zeitschrift*, XXXVI (1876), 1-9, is worth mention, though now in the main superseded. There is also the old study by J. F. C. Hecker, still of interest, which attempts to probe the pathological aspect of religious emotionalism, *Child-Pilgrimages*, trans. Robt. H. Cooke, in Hecker, *The Epidemics of the Middle Ages* (3rd ed., London, 1859), pp. 346-360. It includes English translations of some of the longer contemporary, and not so contemporary, accounts. Paul Alphandéry, "Les Croisades d'enfants," *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, LXXIII (1916), 259-282, relies for the events of the crusade (pp. 259-266) on De Janssens, "Étienne de Cloyes et les croisades d'enfants au XIII^e siècle," *Bulletin de la Société dunoise* (Chateaudun, 1891), pp. 32-40, and is of no independent value. However, Alphandéry has essayed an interesting interpretation: ". . . c'est dans un rite de consécration de la jeunesse ou plutôt de l'enfance . . . que nous allons chercher l'origine des croisades d'enfants" (p. 271). This has now been further developed in his *La Chrétienté et l'idée de Croisade*, II (L'Évolution de l'humanité, XXXVIII bis, Paris, 1959), 115-148, where the Children's Crusade is interpreted as an expression of the medieval child cult, related to such movements as that of the child-builders of churches and bridges, and associated in contemporary minds with the now fully developed feast of the Holy Innocents. In effect, it becomes a sacrificial rite, by which the new innocents offer themselves for the salvation of Christendom. A somewhat different contribution to the study of mass movements such as this, however, is that of Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millenium* (London, 1957), although it has little to say about the Children's Crusade itself (p. 77). Finally there are brief treatments in some of the standard works on the crusades, such as Adolf Waas, *Geschichte der Kreuzzüge*, I (Freiburg, 1956), 253-258, and Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, III (Cambridge, 1954), 139-144 (a somewhat fanciful version).

during the Albigensian Crusade to reward those who threw in their lot with Simon of Montfort, added much to the general cynicism and disillusion.

It would be a serious mistake, however, to believe that the popular attitude toward the crusade had become worldly or trivial. Some there were who debased its ideals, but the great masses of common people were often bewitched by thoughts of liberating the Holy Land. With each successive proclamation of a crusade, the preachers aroused an excitement shared alike by men and women, the old and the young, all eager to redeem past failures and to drive out the "infidel" from the holy places. Within each crusading army the low-born regarded themselves as the elect of God. This was a cliché of the Middle Ages, but one which never failed to find a response, especially among the poor and the oppressed (to say nothing of the unbalanced) always looking for the millennium. It was a peasant whom St. Andrew chose to receive the news of the Holy Lance at Antioch on the First Crusade, saying to him that God had chosen the poor, who surpassed all others in merit and grace.¹ The "Tafurs", camp-followers from northern France and the Lowlands, who were accused of cannibalism² and who frightened their Christian leaders fully as much as they did their Moslem enemies, still felt themselves to be the elect of the army, although they were in fact its very dregs.³ Now, as time passed, with the obvious failure of knightly arms to free Jerusalem, the idea that the meek might do what the proud and mighty had been unable to do all the more possessed the minds of lesser folk.⁴

During the winter of 1211-1212 William, archdeacon of Paris, and James of Vitry recruited crusaders for Simon of Montfort's army, which was continually being depleted by the withdrawal of those who had completed their forty days' service. Their preaching

¹ Raymond of Aguilers, *Historia Francorum* (RHC, Occ., III), p. 254; see volume I of the present work, pp. 320-322.

² Especially by the author of the *Chanson d'Antioche* (ed. Paulin Paris, II [1848], pp. 5-6, and elsewhere), on which cf. Guibert of Nogent, *Gesta Dei per Francos*, VII, 23, ad ann. 1099 (RHC, Occ., IV), pp. 241-243, and Louis Bréhier (ed.), *Histoire anonyme de la première croisade* (Paris, 1924), p. 178: "alii vero c[a]debant carnes eorum [i.e. Saracenorum] per frusta et coquebant ad manducandum." Bréhier, p. 179, note 4, supplies the other sources for the charge of cannibalism made against the dreaded and despised Tafurs.

³ See Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, pp. 45-48.

⁴ Cf. *Annales Reineri Sancti Iacobi Leodiensis*, ad ann. 1212 (MGH, SS., XVI), p. 665: "Erat autem eorum intentio mare se velle transire, et quod potentes et reges non fecerant, sepulcrum Christi recuperare"; and also the account in *Chronicae regiae Coloniensis continuatio prima*, ad ann. 1213 (MGH, SS., XXIV), p. 18, in which the failure of so many others, "reges multi, duces plurimi, populi innumerabiles," is contrasted with the children who are weak and unarmed — scornfully, it is true, but revealing an awareness of contrast which must have been general at the time. See also the brief remarks of A. Waas, *Geschichte der Kreuzzüge*, I, 253.

aroused a tremendous response in both France and Germany.⁵ The crusade against the Albigensians had already attracted large numbers of common folk, not only *bona fide* crusaders but also the "servientes exercitus", as Peter of Les Vaux-de-Cernay euphemistically calls them, the *ribaldi*, unarmed scavengers and hangers-on who added to the uproar of camp life and the difficulty of keeping any discipline whatsoever. This crusade differed from its predecessors in many ways, not least important being the fact that it ultimately aimed at the destruction of the political authority of a Christian prince, the count of Toulouse. Not that such distinctions made any impress on the masses in the north. For them the crusade was proclaimed to root out heresy and end the scourge of the mercenary troops, variously called *routiers* and *cotereaux*, in southern France — nor were heretics and *routiers* always distinct in their minds.⁶ The enemy was near at hand, the goal easy to reach — no long march across the continent, no frightening pull over the treacherous Mediterranean. The first great victory of the Albigensian Crusade, the capture and sack of Béziers in 1209, was made possible by the *ribaldi*, who assaulted the walls on their own, broke into the city, opened its gates to the army, and wreaked terrible havoc on the inhabitants, orthodox and heretic alike.⁷

There had been much preaching of crusade over the past few years, not only against the Albigensians but also against the Muwahhids (Almohads) in Spain, culminating in 1212 in the great Christian victory of Las Navas de Tolosa. It was easy thus to release the religious enthusiasm of the Middle Ages, always close to the surface; it was far more difficult, however, to keep it within bounds when once aroused. Especially was this so in areas of great social ferment such as the Rhine valley and the Lowlands, where old

⁵ Peter of Les Vaux-de-Cernay, *Hystoria Albigensis*, 285 (ed. P. Guébin and E. Lyon, I [Paris, 1926], 281–283).

⁶ For instance, in the *Annales Marbacenses*, ad ann. 1212 (MGH, SS., XVII), p. 172, occurs this revealing entry: "In this year a crusading expedition was undertaken by the duke of Austria . . . to help the count of Montfort fight the Albigensians, who were *routiers* or *cotereaux*, heretics of the land of St. Gilles." And Walter Map, who should have known better since he attended the Third Lateran Council of 1179 and was an examiner of some Waldensian deputies, could write in his description of what he calls "a certain sect of heretics" that "our king, Henry II, is holding off from all his lands a most damnable sect of a new heresy", and these heretics gather in great bands "which they call *Ruttæ*" (*De nugis curialium*, I, xxix [ed. Thomas Wright, Camden Society, London, 1850], p. 60).

⁷ Peter of Les Vaux-de-Cernay, *Hyst. Alb.*, 89, 90 (ed. Guébin and Lyon, I, 91); cf. Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus miraculorum*, V, 21 (ed. Joseph Strange, I [Cologne, Bonn, Brussels, 1851], 302): "Nam quidam satellites zelo fidei accensi, leonibus similes, exemplo illorum de quibus legitur in libro Machabaeorum, scalis apposis, muros intrepide ascenderunt; haereticisque divinitus territis et declinantibus, sequentibus portas aperientes, civitatem obtinuerunt."

social forms were breaking down in the face of increased industrial and urban development, where population was growing rapidly, and where economic insecurity was becoming chronic. The sustained excitement of crusade preaching acted on the people of such areas with explosive force. One could never be certain what form their enthusiasm might take. It was sure to enhance the irritability of those for whom relief from anxiety was often to be obtained only in giving free rein to their passions, and who found in sudden violent action a release from the unbearable insecurity of their dreary lives. But it was a release to be found, then as now, in the crowd, "a device for indulging ourselves in a kind of temporary insanity by all going crazy together."⁸ "Around this time," it is reported, "naked women ran through the towns and cities, saying nothing."⁹ There was always a touch of madness in the air.

There were many examples of the kind of mass psychosis that might develop when religious enthusiasm ran riot, and wiser heads were constantly reminded of the danger. In Brittany some two generations earlier, for instance, there had been the strange case of that "illiterate idiot", Eon de l'Étoile (Eudo de Stella). Hearing in his church the chant "per Eum qui venturus est judicare vivos et mortuos et seculum per ignem," he thought that the "Eum" referred to himself, since Eudo "sermone Gallico Eun diceretur". Lunacy would be served, even by philology! And so Eon looked upon himself as the son of God, come to judge the quick and the dead. He attracted a following of men as foolish as himself, whom he called his angels and apostles. Soon, however, they degenerated into a band of brigands preying on churches and monasteries. Eon and his company dressed richly, feasted hugely, and led such enviable lives that those who came to arrest him were in turn corrupted by the sight of so much high living and joined him instead. He was finally captured and sent to the Council of Rheims (1148) before pope Eugenius III. He had a forked branch which he explained by saying that should the forked end point heavenward, God would hold two thirds of the world, and he the other third; if earthward, the shares would be reversed — whereupon the entire council burst into laughter. Eon was put in the custody of archbishop Samson of Rheims and died in prison soon after. His followers were more severely dealt with, and the three named "Wisdom",

⁸ This definition of a crowd comes from Everett Dean Martin, *The Behavior of Crowds: A Psychological Study* (New York and London, 1920), p. 37, recently quoted in William L. Langer, "The Next Assignment," *AHR*, LXIII (1957-1958), 290.

⁹ *Annales Alberti Abbatis Stadensis*, ad ann. 1212 (*MGH, SS.*, XVI), p. 355.

"Knowledge", and "Judgment", and others with "big names", were given to the flames, "since they preferred to burn than to correct their life."¹⁰

There is another example, from the year 1182, in south central France, where an obscure carpenter, Durand of Le Puy, had a vision in which the Virgin ordered him to exhort the people to peace. She gave him a scrap of parchment upon which was the figure of Mary bearing the infant Jesus in her arms, and the prayer: "Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, give us peace." There quickly grew up around Durand a large movement, dedicated to the destruction of the brigands of the region, and almost as quickly a "rule" was drawn up. The new confraternity briefly enjoyed the support of all classes of society. Soon, however, it also turned on the established authorities, lost the support of nobility and church, became an outcast and undisciplined mob, and was hunted down and finally destroyed. Later writers would express horror and disgust at this "dangerous presumption", this "rebellion against their betters", in which there was shown "no fear, no reverence, of their superiors".¹¹

In the remarkable movement which grew up around the carpenter of Le Puy there is evident the same emotionalism which was to nourish the Children's Crusade. There was also the not untypical *epistola caelestis* so often to be found clutched in the hands of those who seek some visible sign of the continuity of revelation. During the winter and spring of 1211-1212, in the area between the Seine and the Rhine, throughout northeastern France, the

¹⁰ William of Newburgh, *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, I, 19 (ed. Richard Howlett, in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I* [Rolls Series, LXXXII], I), pp. 60-64; *The Chronicle of Robert of Torigni* (*ibid.*, IV), pp. 156-157; Otto of Freising, *The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa*, I, 56, tr. C. C. Mierow and R. Emery (Records of Civilization, New York, 1953), pp. 94-95; *Sigeberti Gemblacensis chronica, continuatio Gemblacensis* (MGH, SS., VI), p. 385; *Sigeberti cont. Praemonstratensis* (*ibid.*), p. 454; cf. Achille Luchaire, *Les Premiers Capétiens* (E. Lavis, Histoire de France, II, Paris, 1901), pp. 360-361. There is no need to follow Cohn (*Pursuit of the Millennium*, p. 38) in attributing to the name Eon "the influence of some Gnostic or Neo-Manichean tradition". Eon is a perfectly good Old French form of the name Odo (Eudo), as the quotation from William of Newburgh itself would clearly indicate.

¹¹ See in general *Roberti canonici S. Mariani Autissiodorensis chronicon*, ad ann. 1183 (MGH, SS., XXVI), p. 247; Geoffrey of Vigois (RHGF, XVIII), p. 219; *Historia episcoporum Autissiodorensis* (RHGF, XVIII), p. 729; *The Chronicle of Robert of Torigni* (*Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I*, IV), p. 309; *The Historical Works of Gervase of Canterbury* (ed. W. Stubbs [Rolls Series, LXXIII], I), pp. 300 ff.; H. F. Delaborde, ed., *Oeuvres de Rigord et de Guillaume le Breton, historiens de Philippe-Auguste* (2 vols., Paris, 1882-1885), I, 38; *Chronicon anonymi Laudunensis canonici* (RHGF, XVIII), pp. 705-706. There are many secondary accounts of the movement, e.g. in H. Géraud, "Les Routiers au xii^e siècle," *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes*, III (1841-1842), 138-147; and Achille Luchaire, *Social France at the Time of Philip Augustus*, tr. E. B. Krehbiel (New York, 1929), pp. 12-18.

Lowlands, and western Germany, empty heads throbbed with the feverish exhortations of preachers and burned with zeal for a crusade. Crowds of enthusiasts were soon marching off to Lanquedoc. Others, from Saxony, Westphalia, and Frisia, were destroying the heretics in their own back yard — the Beguines.¹² Religious sensibilities, however, could stand only so much. The time had come for another of the popular frenzies so characteristic of the period. The time had come, indeed, for another letter from heaven.

The movement which boiled up for a brief moment in 1212 was never, despite the convictions of those who took part in it, a crusade in any legal sense, blessed by the church and encouraged by indulgences. On the contrary, it was deplored by all responsible authority. What has often been looked upon as its "French phase" may not have been considered a crusade even by the participants. In June 1212, it is said, a shepherd boy named Stephen, from Cloyes near Vendôme, beheld a vision of Jesus, who appeared to him in the guise of a poor pilgrim, received some bread from him, and then gave him a letter for the king of France. Soon many of his fellow shepherds gathered about Stephen and accompanied him to St. Denis, and then to Paris to see the king. Meanwhile, a sort of mass hysteria seems to have gripped much of the countryside round about. Many other children were being held in great reverence by the simple crowds, and around these there gathered larger and larger followings of yet more children whose purpose it apparently was to join the "sanctus puer", Stephen.¹³ Another source tells of processions of children, and some adults too, carrying banners and candles, crosses and censers, passing through towns and hamlets and chanting in the vulgar tongue (*gallice*), "Lord God, exalt Christianity! Lord God, restore to us the true cross," and other chants also, since there were many such groups, each singing its own variation.¹⁴ That these bands reached the reported number of 30,000 is doubtful;¹⁵ at all events, many of their members were caught up in the recruiting for the Albigensian Crusade,¹⁶ while most of the others returned home. From Jumièges on the lower Seine comes a brief notice that the children claimed to be "seeking

¹² *Annales Colonienses maximi*, ad ann. 1212 (MGH, SS., XVII), p. 826.

¹³ *Chronicon anonymi Laudunensis canonici* (RHGF, XVIII), p. 715.

¹⁴ *Sigeberti Gemblacensis chronica, auctarium Mortui Maris* (MGH, SS., VI), p. 467; repeated in *Annalium Rotomagensium continuatio* (MGH, SS., XXVI), p. 501.

¹⁵ *Chronica Albrici monachi Trium Fontium*, ad ann. 1212 (MGH, SS., XXIII), p. 893; *Chronicon anonymi Laudunensis canonici* (RHGF, XVIII), p. 715.

¹⁶ *Sigeberti Gemblacensis chronica, auctarium Mortui Maris* (MGH, SS., VI), p. 467.

God".¹⁷ Aside from this vague aspiration, however, there seems to be no contemporary evidence that the children who followed Stephen had any idea of going to the Holy Land.

There is little wonder, however, that in the later accounts of this movement Stephen and his shepherd boys came to be connected with the Children's Crusade. The strange excitement in which they were caught up during that summer of 1212 had already raced swiftly through the region of old Lotharingia between the Rhine and France. There other crowds, young and old, were going far beyond mere processions and chants. To the north and east, in the Benedictine monastery of Andres, near Guines, the monk William was noting the remarkable "peregrinatio", as he called it, of an infinite number of children from various cities and towns, castles and villages, making their way toward the Mediterranean. When asked by their parents and others whither they were going, they too replied as though moved by a single spirit, "to God!"¹⁸ Did they have some notion of going to the Holy Land? It seems almost certain.

Farther east, in the Benedictine house of St. James at Liège, the monk Reiner witnessed a local outbreak of this same movement (*motus mirabilis*). He reports that it embraced not only French but also German children, especially young shepherds and shepherdesses. Those whose parents would not allow them to go wept bitterly. Here at Liège the purpose was clear enough: the children wished to do what princes and kings had failed to do — cross the sea and recover the Sepulcher of Christ. It was another People's Crusade.¹⁹

South of Liège, at Trier, it was much the same story, though here only German and not French children are mentioned. Their leader was a certain Nicholas, a young boy whose home was Cologne. He bore a cross in the form of a Greek Tau, although the chronicler adds, in words with the sound of an eye-witness report, that it was difficult to make out what material it was made of.²⁰

Farther east again, there are additional reports and a few more details. One contemporary, writing in Cologne, provides dates for what he calls "a remarkable, indeed a more-than-remarkable,

¹⁷ *Annales Gemmeticenses*, ad ann. 1212 (MGH, SS., XXVI), p. 510; also *Anonymi continuatio appendicis Roberti de Monte ad Sigebertum* (RHGF, XVIII), p. 344.

¹⁸ *Willelmi chronica Andrensis*, 189 (MGH, SS., XXIV), p. 754.

¹⁹ *Annales Reineri* (MGH, SS., XVI), p. 665.

²⁰ *Gestorum Treverorum continuatio IV*, 3 (MGH, SS., XXIV), p. 399: "nec facile erat discernere, cuius generis et metalli esset."

affair" — around Easter and Pentecost, March 25 and May 13.²¹ This is considerably earlier than the date recorded for Stephen's procession in France, and suggests that the movement may have had its origins in the Lowlands and the Rhine valley, and only its outer fringes on the Seine. Many thousands of children ranging from six years to the age of discretion came together, despite the opposition of their parents, relatives, and friends. Some left their plows, others the flocks and herds which had been in their care, and rushed to take the cross. They moved off in groups of twenty, fifty, or a hundred, with Jerusalem their goal. It was unbelievable. How, they were asked, could they expect to do what kings, dukes, and so many others had failed to do. They replied with simplicity that they would obey the divine command and bear with willing spirit whatever God placed upon them.²² Another Cologne chronicle, quite independently, confirms that French as well as German children were involved, of various ages and conditions. There is the additional note, hardly surprising in view of the circumstances and the times, that some "maligni homines" joined the pilgrimage, pilfered the contributions made to the children by the faithful, and then secretly stole away. One of them was caught and hanged in Cologne.²³

Here, then, was another eloquent expression of popular piety. It appeared miraculous — but the Devil could work seeming miracles. If it was a sign of the simple faith of the people, it was also a potential threat to established authority. In the somewhat sour account from the monastery of Marbach on the upper Rhine we can sense the conservative distrust for the anti-clerical tendencies of the movement.²⁴ "As, in the face of such novelties, we become a credulous mob, so indeed many thought that all this arose not from any foolishness but rather through divine inspiration and a kind of piety, and therefore helped them with food and other necessities. The clergy, however, and certain others, who were more sensible and judged the whole business to be useless, were opposed by the laity, who said that the clergy were unbelievers, and

²¹ The chronicler has mistakenly put his account under the year 1213, during which Easter and Pentecost fell on April 14 and June 2.

²² *Chronicae regiae Coloniensis continuatio prima*, ad ann. 1213 (MGH, SS., XXIV), pp. 17-18.

²³ *Annales Colonienses maximi*, ad ann. 1212 (MGH, SS., XVII), pp. 826-827.

²⁴ Cf. Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium*, p. 66: "Any chiliastic movement was . . . almost compelled by the situation in which it found itself to see the clergy as a demonic factor". It must be added, however, that this one notice from Marbach is the only one which suggests that the Children's Crusade might have turned against ecclesiastical authority. The general silence of the sources, in fact, would indicate that the movement probably never went so far.

that their opposition sprang more from envy and greed than from any love of truth and justice."²⁵ The "mentes saniores" did not, of course, go completely unheard, and managed to divert many at Cologne into the more official enterprise of the Albigensian Crusade. These went off to join Simon of Montfort's army at Puylaurens.²⁶ But there were many others set on going to Jerusalem, on joining this "useless expedition" of "children and stupid adults", undertaken more out of foolish curiosity than any real hope for salvation.²⁷

The route of the various bands which seem to have gathered and formed in or around Cologne²⁸ lay up the Rhine and eventually, for most of them, over the Alps into Lombardy. Some of the children were turned back at Mainz;²⁹ the heat was excessive, and the weak began to fall by the wayside.³⁰ From Speyer we have a brief notice of their passing — not contemporary, it is true, but of some interest since it preserves the date they went through the town, July 25.³¹ At Ebersheim, on a little island in the Ill not far from Schlettstadt, they made a striking impression on the chronicler of the monastery. Nicholas is again named as the leader of this "infinite number" from Germany and France, all convinced that once they reached the sea they could walk across the tops of the waves without wetting their feet.³²

The expedition passed near Marbach, southwest of Colmar. There the chronicler of the Augustinian house grumbled over the indiscretion and uselessness of such a business, and moralized on the inevitable failure of any such venture undertaken "without the balance of reason or the force of counsel." From Marbach, the

²⁵ *Annales Marbacenses* (MGH, SS., XVII), p. 172.

²⁶ Peter of Les Vaux-de-Cernay, *Hyst. Alb.*, 308 (ed. Guébin and Lyon, II, 9, and notes 3 and 4).

²⁷ So the *Annales Marbacenses* (MGH, SS., XVII), p. 172: ". . . curiositatis causa potius quam salutis".

²⁸ We cannot accept the account of Joseph E. Hansbery, "The Children's Crusade," *The Catholic Historical Review*, XXIV (1938), 32 ff., that Sens was "one of the points of origin of the real Children's Crusade," and that the children then moved along the route Sens-Troyes-Châlons-Liège-Cologne — certainly a roundabout way of reaching the Holy Land from Sens. All this is based on Richer of Sens, a very late source (see Waitz, in MGH, SS., XXV, 251: "Narrationis telam usque ad a. 1264 deduxit [Richerus]; maiorem libri partem antea, non tamen ante a. 1254 vel 1255 scripsisse videtur"). Richer says nothing of the children being in Sens, but rather gives the impression of a movement abroad (*Richeri gesta Senoniensis ecclesiae*, IV, 3 [MGH, SS., XXV], p. 301).

²⁹ *Chronicae regiae Coloniensis cont. prima* (MGH, SS., XXIV), p. 18.

³⁰ *Annales Reineri* (MGH, SS., XVI), p. 665: "Estus Iulii permaximus quindecim primis diebus." Cf. *Annales Colonienses maximi* (MGH, SS., XVII), p. 827: "Multi etiam illorum in silvis et desertis locis estu, fame, et siti perierunt."

³¹ *Annales Spirenses* (MGH, SS., XVII), p. 84.

³² *Chronicon Ebersheimense*, 36 (MGH, SS., XXIII), p. 450; cf. *Sicardi episcopi Cremonensis chronicon* (RISS, VII), col. 624 "[dicentes] se per siccum maria transituros."

multitude swarmed through the Alps and into Italy, whether by the St. Gotthard or the Splügen is not known. There they broke up into groups and dispersed among the various towns of Lombardy where they were despoiled by the natives.³³ A notice from Salzburg indicates that some reached Treviso; possibly they hoped to take ship at Venice.³⁴ But the main body seems to have gone in the other direction, reaching Piacenza on August 20. Nicholas was still the leader of what, despite losses, must even yet have been an impressive pilgrimage, a "great and innumerable multitude of German children, babes at the breast, women and girls," all hastening down to the sea to fulfil the prophecy of an angel of God that they would recover the Holy Sepulcher from the hands of the iniquitous Saracens.³⁵ Nearby, at Cremona, bishop Sicard also recorded their passage, in drier tones perhaps, but with the authentic note that the company had come from Cologne.³⁶

From the valley of the Po, Nicholas and his followers pressed on to the south and the sea. They were in Genoa by Saturday, August 25, bearing crosses, with their pilgrim staves and leathern wallets — more than seven thousand, so it was estimated. They obviously received no encouragement, no offer of sea transportation to the Holy Land, for the very next day most of them were gone again, although many of their number dropped out and remained behind.³⁷ From Genoa there is no longer any clear trail to follow. The "crusade" had been breaking up all the way from Germany to Italy; many had died, many others had returned home discouraged, or stopped at places such as Genoa and gone no further. A late source reports that two boat-loads sailed from Pisa, of whom nothing more was heard.³⁸ There are reports that a body of the crusaders went to Rome, where Innocent III relieved of their crusading oaths those who were too young and those weighed down

³³ *Annales Marbacenses* (MGH, SS., XVII), p. 172; cf. *Annales Colonienses maximi* (MGH, SS., XVII), p. 827: "Alii Alpes transgressi, mox ut Ytaliā intraverunt a Longobardis spoliati et repulsi, cum ignominia redierunt."

³⁴ *Annales Sancti Rudberti Salisburgenses*, ad ann. 1212 (MGH, SS., IX), p. 780: "que [multitudo] et iubente papa Innocentio, missis cardinalibus, apud Tarvisium Ytalie repel-litur."

³⁵ *Annales Placentini Guelfi*, ad ann. 1212 (MGH, SS., XVIII), p. 426: "Die autem Martis proximo, 13 Kal. Septembris . . .". August 20 was Monday, not Tuesday. The *Chronica regiae Coloniensis cont. prima* also refers to their reaching Piacenza.

³⁶ *Sicardi episcopi Cremonensis chronicon* (RISS, VII), col. 624. Unfortunately, Sicard says nothing of the outcome, except "demum quasi evanuit universa". Instead, he allows the sad facts of the expedition to remind him of a yet sadder, though less authentic, story of children in Apulia and Sicily, where the famine was so severe that they were eaten by their mothers.

³⁷ *Annales Ogerii Panis* (MGH, SS., XVIII), p. 131. A tradition of Genoese hostility is preserved in Jacobus de Varagine, *Chronica de civitate Januensi* (RISS, IX, i), p. 45.

³⁸ *Richeri gesta Senoniensis ecclesiae*, IV, 3 (MGH, SS., XXV), p. 301.

by too many years.³⁹ He is said to have remarked: "These children put us to shame. They rush to recover the Holy Land while we sleep."⁴⁰ The chronicler of Trier puts some crusaders ultimately in Brindisi, where the archbishop refused them permission to sail.⁴¹ There are two conflicting accounts of what happened to their leader, Nicholas. One has him going on the Fifth Crusade and fighting at the siege of Damietta, finally returning home safe; the other states that he died in Italy and that his father, who had been guilty of selling some of the children as slaves, committed suicide after returning to Cologne.⁴² From these vague and conflicting accounts we may assume that much of the Children's Crusade melted away in Italy. The footsore and deluded crusaders, greatly reduced in number, now began the long trek back over the Alps. They had marched south proudly in great singing crowds. Now, with no dream to sustain them any longer, they made their painful way homeward, barefoot, hungry, objects of scorn and derision to those who had so recently held them in awe and reverence.⁴³

One group of these unfortunates remains to be accounted for. It would seem that at some point along the way a party of children headed for Marseilles. Whether this happened before crossing the Alps or after reaching Genoa is impossible to say. The chronicle of Ebersheim refers to their destination as "Vienne, which is a city by the sea."⁴⁴ Although the chronicler's geography leaves something to be desired, this seems to indicate a route from Ebersheim by the Doubs and the Rhone. On the other hand, the party which eventually turned up at Marseilles might have been an independent one; the sources do not permit certainty. At all events, the presence of child crusaders in the Rhone valley is certainly indicated, and is supported by two other accounts which put some of them in Marseilles.⁴⁵ What happened to this group is best told in the words of Aubrey of Trois-Fontaines.

"In this year [1212] there was a quite miraculous expedition of

³⁹ *Chronicae regiae Coloniensis cont. prima* (MGH, SS., XXIV), p. 18; *Annales Marbacenses* (MGH, SS., XVII), p. 172.

⁴⁰ *Annales Alberti Abbatis Stadensis* (MGH, SS., XVI), p. 355.

⁴¹ *Gestorum Treverorum cont. IV*, 3 (MGH, SS., XXIV), p. 399.

⁴² *Annalium Admontensium continuatio* (MGH, SS., IX), p. 592; *Gestorum Treverorum cont. IV*, 3 (MGH, SS., XXIV), p. 399.

⁴³ *Annales Marbacenses* (MGH, SS., XVII), p. 172: "Sic ergo decepti et confusi redire ceperunt, et qui prius gregatim et per turmas suas et numquam sine cantu celeumatis transire solebant per terras, modo singillatim et in silentio, nudipedes et famelici redeuntes, facti sunt omnibus in derisum, quia plurime virgines rapte et florem pudicie sue amiserunt."

⁴⁴ *Chronicon Ebersheimense*, 36 (MGH, SS., XXIII), p. 450.

⁴⁵ *Chronicae regiae Coloniensis cont. prima* (MGH, SS., XXIV), p. 18; *Chronica Albrici monachi T'ium Fontium*, ad ann. 1212 (MGH, SS., XXIII), p. 893.

children, coming together from all around. They first came from the area of the castle of Vendôme to Paris.⁴⁶ When they numbered around 30,000 they went to Marseilles, intending to cross the sea against the Saracens. The *ribaldi* and other evil men who joined them sullied the entire army, so that while some perished at sea, and others were sold, only a few of so great a multitude made their way home. Of these, those who had escaped from all this gave the pope their promise that when they became of age they would then cross the sea as crusaders. Now, the betrayers of those children are said to have been Hugh Ferreus and William Porcus, merchants of Marseilles. Since they were the captains of vessels, they were supposed to carry them overseas in the cause of God at no cost, as they had promised to them. They filled seven large ships with them; and when they were two days out, off the island of St. Peter *ad rupem*, which is called Recluse, a storm blew up, two of the ships were lost, and all the children aboard were drowned. It is said that some years later pope Gregory IX built a church of the New Innocents on that island, and installed twelve prebendaries. In the church repose the bodies of the children which the sea threw up there, and up to the present time pilgrims may see them uncorrupted. The betrayers meanwhile sailed the other five ships to Bougie and Alexandria, and there sold all those children to Saracen princes and merchants. From them the caliph [an-Nāṣir] bought four hundred, eighty of them priests and all of them clerics, whom he wished to separate from the others, and he dealt with them more honorably than was his custom. This was the same caliph of whom I spoke earlier as studying at Paris in the guise of a cleric. He learned well those things which are known amongst us, and lately he has given up sacrificing camel's flesh.⁴⁷ In the same year in which the children were sold there was a meeting of Saracen princes at Baghdad where they slew eighteen children, who were martyred in various ways, since they were quite unwilling to give up the Christian faith; but they diligently reared the rest of the children in slavery. One of these clerics, who saw all this, and whom the caliph had purchased for himself, has faithfully reported that he heard of absolutely none of these children apostatizing from Christianity. The two betrayers, Hugh Ferreus and William Porcus,

⁴⁶ This is a reminiscence of the processions of Stephen and the other shepherds; the explanation of Hansbery, "The Children's Crusade," *The Catholic Historical Review*, XXIV, 33, that Aubrey confused the processions to St. Denis and Paris with the crusade proper, and that here he is reconciling two separate traditions, seems most probable.

⁴⁷ At the suggestion of the editor, Paul Scheffer-Boichorst, reading "*carnem camelinam*" for "*panem camelinum*" which makes no sense.

afterwards went to the prince of the Saracens of Sicily, Mirabel [the emir Ibn-'Abs], wishing to plan to turn the emperor Frederick over to him; but the emperor, by the grace of God, triumphed over them. He hanged Mirabel, his two sons, and those two betrayers, all from one gallows. Eighteen years after the expedition, adds my informant, Mascemuch of Alexandria still possessed seven hundred — no longer children, but grown men."⁴⁸

Aubrey's account is the classic source for the fate of the Children's Crusade. Together with the various legends which quickly grew up, both in prose and verse, it helped to feed the romantic imaginations of a later day. Dana C. Munro rejected it many years ago, however, on the grounds that it rests solely on the evidence of a single cleric who claimed to have returned, and is full of improbabilities, "such as the facts that eighty of the infants were priests, and that the Moslems tortured the children to make them apostatize." Furthermore, since no chronicle mentions the band of children [here Munro is referring to Stephen of Cloyes' band] at any place between Paris and Marseilles, and no chronicle south of the Loire mentions the movement, there could have been no crusaders at Marseilles and the entire account must obviously be classed with all the other legends obscuring the true facts of the Children's Crusade.⁴⁹

The fact that Aubrey's story seems to describe a French expedition which cannot be confirmed by other sources need cause no difficulty. It has already been suggested that, writing as late as he did, he fused the tradition of Stephen and the shepherd processions around Paris with the story told him by his informant.⁵⁰ Furthermore, two independent accounts, one certainly and the other probably written before Aubrey's, put some of the crusaders in the Rhone valley and in Marseilles, as we have seen. There were child crusaders in Marseilles — not from around Paris, to be sure, but from the Lowlands and the Rhine valley, French and German both as so many contemporary observers testify.

Joseph Hansbery has suggested further that, making due allowance for Aubrey's overcredulousness, the main elements of his account may be accepted since it contains statements which can be confirmed by other sources. This is true enough. Unfortunately, as an example, Hansbery chose the founding of the church of the New Innocents, the ruins of which "were discovered by Newton

⁴⁸ *Chronica Albrici monachi Trium Fontium* (MGH, SS., XXIII), pp. 893-894.

⁴⁹ Dana C. Munro, "The Children's Crusade," *AHR*, XIX (1913-1914), 520.

⁵⁰ Above, note 46.

Perkins in 1867."⁵¹ Perkins' letter in which he describes his trip to the island of St. Peter, however, is very slim evidence indeed for any such assertion. Apparently no one on the island ever heard of the church or its ruins, in itself a telling fact against its existence. "Outside the wall . . . we came upon the ruins of something, either a house or a church." The reasons which Perkins adduced for suggesting that this might be the remains of the church of the New Innocents are tenuous indeed, and may be credited to a very obvious desire to tell his correspondent, George Gray, what he wanted to hear.⁵²

It is possible, however, to check Aubrey's account at other points. He has referred to Hugh Ferreus (or Ferus) and William Porcus, both well known persons. In the case of the former, at least, it would not be surprising to find him playing the role attributed to him in Aubrey's account. He was *viguier* of Marseilles at the time — not a municipal officer, but rather the representative of the viscount.⁵³ As such he might have had to deal with the problem posed by the arrival of the child crusaders. William Porcus, however, presents some difficulties. He was not a merchant of Marseilles, as Aubrey says, but a Genoese captain of considerable reputation,⁵⁴ and served the emperor Frederick II as admiral⁵⁵ before falling into disfavor and having to flee from the kingdom of Sicily in 1221.⁵⁶ Aubrey probably knew of this, and knew also that around the same time (in 1222) Frederick captured the Moslem pirate Ibn-'Abs (Mirabellus, Mirabettus, Mirabs in the Latin

⁵¹ Hansbery, "Children's Crusade," p. 33, note 16.

⁵² Perkins' letter may be found in App. B of the highly imaginative work of George Zabriskie Gray, *The Children's Crusade* (London, 1871), pp. 234-237. His reasons for thinking the ruins he found were of the church of the New Innocents were, first, that there was no habitation nearby; second, that the building faced due east, "if we may consider the standing wall as the place of the altar" which seemed probable to him since it had no door and had a high window; third, that the stones at the base were large, near the top smaller; and finally, "it had not the appearance of being restored"!

⁵³ On Hugh, see the notice in August Potthast, *Regesta pontificum Romanorum*, I (Berlin, 1874), 220 (no. 2563): ". . . capella s. Mariae Massiliensis . . . quam Hugo Ferus civis Massiliensis suis sumptibus dicatur construxisse . . ."; also, on the treaty of peace between Pisa and Marseilles dated August 27, 1210, in which Hugh seems to have played a part, Archives municipales de Marseille, AA. 11, cited by Raoul Busquet, "L'Origine des viguiers et des vigueries en Provence," *Provincia*, I (1921), 66, note 7: "Ugo Ferus ejusdem civitatis . . . vicarius". Hugh is, in fact, the prototype of the Provençal *viguier* of the future (*ibid.*); there are several notices of him in H. de Gérin-Richard and Émile Isnard, *Actes concernant les viscomtes de Marseille et leurs descendants* (Monaco and Paris, 1926), *passim*.

⁵⁴ He was active in the Genoese war against Pisa in 1205 (*Annales Januenses: Ogerii Panis annales*, ad ann. 1205 [MGH, SS., XVIII], p. 123).

⁵⁵ See the documents of 1216 and 1218 which he witnessed, in J. L. A. Huillard-Bréholles, *Historia diplomatice Friderici secundi*, I, ii (Paris, 1852), 485, 489, 492, 530.

⁵⁶ *Annales Januenses: Marchisii scribae annales*, ad ann. 1221 (MGH, SS., XVIII), pp. 146-147.

sources), and hanged him and his sons at Palermo.⁵⁷ Aubrey apparently tied together three independent incidents to produce a story of two evil merchants selling Christian children into Moslem slavery, plotting against the emperor, and finally meeting a fitting end at the hands of the hangman.

In fact, there is no independent evidence that either was hanged; nor, unfortunately, that Hugh Ferreus, *viguier* of Marseilles, and William Porcus, "amiraglio de Misina", even knew one another. If there were, Aubrey's story would be strengthened considerably. If, however, one may accept the suggestion of Reinhold Röhricht, that Aubrey (or, after so many years, his informant) got his names mixed up, and substituted the name of the notorious William Porcus for the obscure William of Posquères, then most of the difficulties disappear. There is evidence that William of Posquères and Hugh Ferreus were associated in 1190, at the siege of Acre during the Third Crusade, when Guy of Lusignan granted commercial privileges in Acre to the citizens of Marseilles.⁵⁸

It was inevitable that Aubrey's account contain some absurdities, depending as it did on the memory of one who was trying to recall events of some eighteen years earlier, and easily tempted into exaggeration. Four hundred clerics, among them eighty priests, is an obvious case in point. But to deny that clerics were present at all would be to misinterpret the temper of the time. Most of the more reliable sources indicate that the expedition included many grown-ups, and one may safely assume that priests and those in lesser orders were no more immune to the contagion of that hot summer than other adults, although the number participating would be small. Aubrey's account also seems to fit with the rest of our meager knowledge: the tradition that the children were sold into slavery; the fact that Bougie and Alexandria were the commercial centers of North Africa most frequented by merchants of Marseilles at this time; that Marseilles was a slave mart of some importance.⁵⁹ While we must continue, therefore, to discount what seems

⁵⁷ Huillard-Bréholles, *Historia diplomatica Friderici secundi*, II, i, 254; cf. Ernst Kantorowicz, *Frederick the Second (1194-1250)* (New York, 1931), pp. 128-129; Eduard Winkelmann, *Kaiser Friedrich II.*, I (Leipzig, 1889), 188-189; Michele Amari, *Storia dei musulmani di Sicilia*, III, ii (2nd ed., Catania, 1938), 609-612.

⁵⁸ J. P. Papon, *Histoire générale de Provence*, II (Paris, 1778), xxiv-xxvi (no. 25); R. Röhricht, *Regest regni Hierosolymitana* (Innsbruck, 1893), p. 186; cf. *idem*, "Der Kinderkreuzzug," *Historische Zeitschrift*, XXXVI (1876), 5, note 4, citing Louis Méry and F. Guindon, *Histoire analytique et chronologique des actes et des délibérations du corps et du conseil de la municipalité de Marseille*, I (Marseilles, 1841), 190-192, and with incorrect date 1187.

⁵⁹ R. Busquet and R. Pernoud, *Histoire du commerce de Marseille*, I (Paris, 1949), 169 ff.

exaggerated and absurd, there is no point in throwing out the baby with the bath. The main lines of the story seem acceptable enough.

The Children's Crusade had a pathetic end, but this did not prevent writers of the thirteenth century, and even later, from drawing the obvious moral. "This work was not of God";⁶⁰ the Devil was behind it;⁶¹ or the Old Man of the Mountain,⁶² or "a certain evil man";⁶³ Stephen of Cloyes may have been a boy in years, but he was most vile in his way of life, and his followers perished through the design of Satan.⁶⁴ The disapproval, however, though stemming from a well grounded fear of social unrest and popular upheaval, succeeded neither in modifying popular expressions of religious enthusiasm nor in branding the Children's Crusade as devilish work. There would be other examples of mass hysteria of children, not always, to be sure, connected with the crusade. For instance, in 1237 some thousand or so children danced and leaped their way from Erfurt to Arnstadt. Although their parents went out and brought them home the next day, some of the children continued ill for some time, suffering from trembling of the limbs.⁶⁵ From the slight notices we have of the matter, it seems to have been an early form of St. Vitus' dance.

This episode has a certain affinity with the legendary case of the children of Hameln, in the diocese of Minden. On the day of Sts. John and Paul, June 26, 1284, there came over the bridge and in through the Weser gate a young man of thirty years, whose beauty and fine dress everyone admired. He had a silver flute, and when he played it all the boys who heard him, to the number of 130, followed him out through the Eastgate to the place where beheadings were held, called "Calvary" by the villagers. There they all disappeared. The mothers of the missing children ran from town to town, but could find no trace of them. And, so the tale goes, as one would

⁶⁰ *Annales Reineri* (MGH, SS., XVI), p. 665.

⁶¹ *Annalium Admontensium cont.* (MGH, SS., IX), p. 592; cf. the late fifteenth-century account of Werner Rolewinck, *Fasciculus temporum*: "Pueri xx milia et amplius de almania convenientes diabolica machinatione decepti cruce signantur, quasi per eos deus vellet recuperare terram sanctam, secundum illud 'Ex ore infantium' etc. Sed cum ad mare venissent, a piratis dolose in naves rapiuntur quasi eos ad iherusalem ducere promittentibus, verum multos submerserunt alios vendiderunt sarracenis" (University of Pennsylvania MS., Lat. 85, f. 36v).

⁶² See Hansbery, "Children's Crusade," p. 31, note 3.

⁶³ Roger Bacon, *Opus majus ad Clementem IV*, ed. Samuel Jebb (Venice, 1750), p. 189: "post quendam malignum hominem".

⁶⁴ Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora* (ed. H. R. Luard [Rolls Series, LVII], II), p. 558: "puer aetate fuit et moribus pervilis". Cf. Rolewinck, *op. cit.*: "Sic patet quomodo diabolus eciam suas cruces predicavit."

⁶⁵ J. F. C. Hecker, *Child-Pilgrimages*, pp. 353, 360.

ordinarily reckon the date according to the birth of the Lord, or as such and such a year after a jubilee, in Hameln it is done according to the year of the disappearance of the children.

Here is the earliest surviving version of the well known story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin — without, as yet, any rats. It comes from a fifteenth-century manuscript, but reports an older tradition: "These things I have found in an ancient book. And deacon John of Lügde's mother saw the children go off."⁶⁶ What really happened to these children we do not know. The actual event is obscured by the later legend, and there is no contemporary evidence. But it can hardly be doubted that we are in the presence of yet another of the sudden and inexplicable seizures from which juveniles in the mass suffer from time to time — a phenomenon not unknown in our own day.

Even more important than these examples, however, is the rising of the shepherds in France in 1251. They planned to go to the Holy Land to rescue their king, Louis IX. Here again are all the confused elements of restlessness, religious hysteria, and blind violence generally to be feared in movements of this kind. The "Master of Hungary", as the leader was called, had his *epistola caelestis* in a hand which he always kept closed — a command from the Virgin to preach the crusade to the lowly shepherds, since the military pride of the Franks was displeasing to God. The movement is thus akin to the Children's Crusade, all the more so because of the area of its origins (Picardy, Flanders, Brabant, and Hainault) and its heterogeneous composition of men, women, and children. Matthew Paris even accuses the Master of being an old leader of the Children's Crusade "around forty years ago". Though at first favored by the queen, Blanche of Castile, the movement quickly degenerated into a lawless rabble. Everywhere they went there were scenes of terror and bloodshed: at Rouen, where they ejected archbishop Odo and his clergy from the cathedral; at Orléans, where they clashed with the scholars and killed or threw into the Loire some twenty-five of them, wounding many more; at Tours, where they assaulted the Dominican convent, profaned the churches, even mutilated a statue of the Virgin. Later the Master, with the greater number of his followers, occupied Bourges, where one of the

⁶⁶ The growth of the legend is traced in Heinrich Spanuth, *Der Rattenfänger von Hameln: vom Werden und Sinn einer alten Sage* (Hameln, 1951), in which there is a photographic reproduction of the page in the MS. in question, giving the earliest form of the legend (at p. 16). See also Waltraud Wöller, "Zur Sage vom Rattenfänger zu Hameln," *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin*, Gesellschafts- und sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe, VI (1956-1957), part 2, 135-146.

citizens, an "executioner with a two-edged sword," says Matthew, "sent him headless to hell"; his body was left to be eaten at the crossroads, while his followers were dispersed "and were everywhere cut down like mad dogs".⁶⁷

The Children's Crusade, while it had chiliastic undertones, never went so far as to invite this kind of destruction. Though opposed by responsible elements of society, it was nevertheless tolerated since it retained the form and appearance of a crusade and did not challenge established authority so far as we know. Seen in its historical setting, however, it remains one of a series of social explosions through which medieval men and women — and children, too, wonderfully sympathetic to the agitations of their elders — found release. But history has not viewed it in this way. Instead, despite the general disapproval of those who lived at the time, it has been the beauty of little children doing God's work, and the pathos of little children sold into slavery, which have stirred the imagination of later ages.

⁶⁷ Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora*, V, 246 ff. Cf. Élie Berger, *Histoire de Blanche de Castille, reine de France* (Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, LXX, Paris, 1895), pp. 393-401.