

ing this considerable mass of information Professor Sauer has the advantages not only of a lifetime of experience as a historical geographer, but also of personal knowledge of the islands as they are today.

He pays proper tribute to the accuracy of the observations in Las Casas's *Apologética Historia*. That immense and rambling work has been much underrated by many historians; Professor Sauer must be one of the very few modern scholars who have read it through. He takes Lovén to task for misusing the word "Taino," which denoted a social class rather than a people. He deplores the cupidity that made Juan de la Cosa, the eminent navigator and early shipmate of Columbus, turn his attention from cartography to slave-raiding; la Cosa's death from a Chibcha poisoned arrow must have robbed historians of much precious information about the Colombian coast. He renders belated justice to Andrés de Morales, the gifted and careful cartographer of Hispaniola. The whole chapter on the aboriginal condition of the islands is a masterpiece of precise condensation.

The story of the major exploring expeditions is succinctly told, with crisp and confident characterization of the leaders—Ojeda, the shifty desperado; the Guerra brothers, bold entrepreneurs of the pearl fishery; Nicuesa, the overconfident fool. Columbus receives perhaps unduly rough handling. That he lacked the talents of a successful colonial governor is certain. He was greedy for gold; but who in this catalogue was not? He had an overexuberant imagination, amounting often to self-deception, and it may well be argued that disappointment in his later years affected his mind; but surely his gifts as a seagoing commander and a self-taught (if somewhat old-fashioned) navigator are well established. More than twenty years ago, Samuel Eliot Morison called attention to the uncanny accuracy of his dead-reckoning; Columbus carried a compass rose in his head.

Over half of Professor Sauer's book is concerned with settlement and early government, and here the characterization of the principal actors is sharper still. There are brilliant sketches of the callous, stupid greed of Pedrarias Dávila in Castilla del Oro; of the vigorous leadership, sound judgment, and relative moderation of Balboa; of the lazy, slovenly exploitation of Cuba by Diego de Velázquez. Bobadilla is painted not as the familiar arbitrary tyrant and oppressor of Columbus, but as a conscientious if unimaginative officer who had good reason, according to his lights, for his arbitrary actions. The evidence for this judgment is slender. Ovando emerges a curiously shadowy figure, though there is an uncompromising ac-

count of his severities against the Arawaks of Hispaniola. We are also given a brief and most unattractive picture of the callous and avaricious—though able—cabal in Spain, led by Rodríguez de Fonseca, to whom Ferdinand entrusted the organization — and taxation — of his newly-won dominions.

The story is a complex one. Professor Sauer has written by far the best summary of it that has yet appeared. His book does not contain new information, in the sense of information not formerly available in print, but it sheds much new light. The study offers a remarkable series of informed, sound, and balanced judgments, some of which are moral ones. The story is tragic as well as complex, and moral judgments could hardly be avoided. Here is what Dr. Sauer has to say about the fate of the natives of the Antilles:

To most of those who held power in the early years the Indians were manpower and nothing else. It is significant that the first census in the New World was a statistic of native numbers as to age suited to labor. What happened to the natives determined the character of the Spanish colonies. The responsibility for the course of events is divided between those in charge in the new possessions and those who gave directions in Spain. That things went so very badly is due in part to inexperience in administering a suddenly acquired and unexpected colonial empire, to its remoteness and poor communications, to internal troubles in Spain, and to involvement in European quarrels. We may not forget that Spaniards were the severest and most insistent critics of the sad state of their own colonies and that gradually they brought about admirable reforms.

The Author: Partisans of Christopher Columbus had some bad moments a few months ago when Yale University unveiled its "Vinland Map" as new and concrete evidence that Norsemen had been in North America long before the Genoese navigator arrived. Columbians may be in for another shock this week with the release of a scholarly work by Carl O. Sauer, *The Early Spanish Main*.

A renowned specialist in human geography, whose knowledge of Latin American terrain, flora, fauna, and the living habits of pre-Columbian natives is almost encyclopedic, Dr. Sauer has applied his own brand of detective work in original sources to trace what really happened in the New World from 1492 to 1519. Columbus comes out rather badly in the result.

Actually, the author emphasizes, his appraisal of Columbus is a minor theme in this book, which never was designed as a popular history, although a wide lay audience is anticipated for it. *The Early Spanish Main* was planned as a monograph. But in human geography you can't keep your sights too narrow, the amiable, pipe-smoking scholar explained during a recent interview; and the monograph got out of hand. More and more accepted legends in the Columbus saga had to be proved wrong; centuries of press-agentry had to be stripped away. (The navigator's son Ferdinand's filial work of devotion, for example, must be used with "extreme caution.")

This digging deeper and deeper into a scholarly theme is typical of Dr. Sauer's work pattern. In effect, *The Early Spanish Main* is the result of some forty-three years of such digging. Professor Sauer came to Berkeley in 1923, a University of Michigan specialist in

Midwest geography. He intended to concentrate on the California terrain, but found that this geographical field was already overcrowded with good men. So he set his sights south, to Mexican Baja California, where he first explored Spanish Jesuit mission ruins and Indian culture with a group of graduate students on holiday.

Dr. Sauer concentrated on the missions of northwest Mexico, that intelligent and unique Jesuit extension of New Spain that was sympathetic to the Indians, their language, even their gods. Over the years, the scholar's interests were drawn farther south and east, finally to the Caribbean. His discoveries have resulted in a new tapestry of the sad saga of New Spain. *The Early Spanish Main* is the essence of those discoveries.

Romantics may not like the book. In biography, history, or human geography, the author explained, one must take sides, must commit himself. Americans especially are likely to have built-in partisanship in any endeavor—Republican or Democrat, Giant fan or Dodger rooter. However, if such partisanship should reach to the Christopher Columbus story, one must not ignore the facts.

Ten years retired from the classroom, Dr. Sauer is still engaged in scholarly (perhaps controversial) detective work. His next book, *In Northern Mists*, will be a re-evaluation of North Atlantic seafaring during the Middle Ages—feats of navigation by Basques, Bretons, Norsemen, the early English, and the fantastically underrated, sophisticated Irish maritime pioneers. "Do you know," the scholar asked, with pipe pointed menacingly at us, "that the Irish may have reached North America long before the Vikings?"

—WILLIAM HOGAN.

In the Days of Knights

The Crusades, by Zoé Oldenbourg, translated from the French by Anne Carter (Pantheon, 650 pp. \$6.95), brings the novelist's insight to a historical account of Europe's first collective military enterprise. Thomas G. Bergin is professor of Romance languages at Yale and author of a recent study of Dante.

By THOMAS G. BERGIN

THE CRUSADES—that series of intermittent assaults of the West on the infidel East—cover some 200 years of warfare, from the fiery incitements of Peter the Hermit (of “contemptible appearance,” as Gibbon affirms) in 1095 to the fall of Acre, the last bastion of Christianity, in 1291. They make up a remarkable chapter in our history.

They can be seen as the first great collective military enterprise in which all of Europe participated. They can be studied for what they have to tell us about a truly significant if sanguinary contact between East and West. They fascinate us for their religious and even mystical aspects. They are also an inexhaustible mine for those who look for golden tales of battle, romance, intrigue, and high adventure. And they provide a background, exotic and colorful in itself, for a magnificent cast of characters, ranging from the dedicated saint to the brutal gangster, from the valiant and simple man of action to the most astute conniver, from the victorious general to the pathetic and forsaken widow.

Individual personalities and specific episodes could furnish—indeed, have furnished—the fancy of poets and writers with the best raw material. To indicate the wealth of motifs it is sufficient to call to mind the affair of the holy lance, the combats of Richard and Saladin, the sad saga of the Leper King (“one of the greatest examples of moral fiber in all of history,” as Zoé Oldenbourg well says). The place names are evocative: Ascalon, Tripoli, Damascus, Aleppo; and those of the actors no less so: Bohemond, Tancred, Raymond of St. Gilles, Melisende, Queen Regent of Jerusalem. The stage is almost overcluttered with knights, barons, seneschals, caliphs, viziers, and atabegs.

Even in their own day the Crusades were tolerably well documented. Considering the period, they have an abun-

dance of chroniclers—Latin, Byzantine, and Moslem, all of whom have been studied and restudied, edited, corrected, and interpreted by a number of historians of modern times. Only recently Steven Runciman brought to a conclusion his three-volume history of the era. Even so, many puzzles remain. Why did the Crusades start just when they did? After all, as Miss Oldenbourg points out, the Christian world had for centuries tolerated the domination of the Holy Land by the infidel. Was their motivation piety, greed, or the restlessness of a ruling class that knew no pastime but war and could no longer find enough of it at home? Or was it rather, as Miss Oldenbourg seems at times to suggest, a kind of instinctive urge similar to that which in Tolstoy's view led the French to their invasion of Russia? Were the Crusaders looking for the Earthly or the Heavenly Jerusalem?

SINCE the ground has been gone over so often one may ask why we have yet another book (a large one, too) on this subject. Miss Oldenbourg, though she has prepared herself well, has unearthed nothing new as far as the facts are concerned, nor are her interpretations of causes and effects strikingly novel. Her book, which covers only the first hundred years, from Godfrey to Richard, is well worth reading all the same, and this, it seems to me, for the element of the personal that she brings into it. She is not afraid to hazard her guesses as to the motivations of these long-departed warriors; she participates with the intuition of the novelist in their crises and their decisions, and she gives us lively sketches of their personalities, not omitting physical descriptions. The result is an absorbing work, true history set forth with the empathy of a creative writer.

There are, to be sure, pages that are hard-going: the interminable series of alliances, betrayals, vendettas, and jockeyings for position that went on during the eighty years of the Latin kingdom, while sad and moving in its implications, is pointless and dull in detailed accounting. Indeed, Miss Oldenbourg, speaking of those purely local squabbles, concedes that “any account however abbreviated would overwhelm the patient reader with endless repetition of place names (often the same) . . . and the names of men . . . coming and going so fast that any attempt to keep track of them is doomed to failure.” But bore-



—From the book.

Frederick I Barbarossa—a stage cluttered with caliphs, viziers, and atabegs.

dom and frustration were in fact a part of the exercise.

If we read the book as we do a novel we may close it with a sense of gratitude for the royal entertainment it has provided. When we think of it as a chapter in history we can, I think, feel only a sense of depression. For the result of the Crusades was not ultimately to free the sepulcher; when the smoke cleared away, the infidel was more firmly entrenched than ever before. The political result was in fact to destroy the Eastern Empire (though Miss Oldenbourg does not take us that far) and eventually to allow the Turk to overrun the Balkans and threaten the walls of Vienna.

Perhaps there were some cultural gains; silks, spices, and a kind of tolerance of comfortable living were brought into the West as a result of the great adventure, but one suspects Italian traders would have found less bloody ways of effecting this result. Saddest of all to contemplate is the disintegration of the truly religious impulse which, under force of circumstance, gave way to calculation and hypocrisy. As for the sins committed in the name of Christian piety (the sack of Jerusalem, for example) it is best not to think about them.

Yet the Crusades remain a glamorous and meaningful episode in our history and, even more, a kind of outer symbol of the mixed elements that combine in our heritage: the old Teutonic joy of battle, the thrust for power and property, the impulse to action for its own sake, the authentic need, however it may be manipulated and betrayed, for an ideal. No, the Crusaders were not so very different from us, and in bringing them to life again Miss Oldenbourg teaches us something about ourselves.