

BOOK REVIEWS

CRUSADES, COMMERCE AND ADVENTURE. By G. G. Coulton.
(Nelson; 2/6.)

This book forms one of an interesting and promising series of text-books which are being published under the general editorship of Mr. John Buchan. In his editorial preface—which for some unknown reason is concealed at the end of the book after the index—Mr. Buchan says: 'The old teaching of national history was apt to give a false perspective. It is necessary, when British history is being taught, to make it clear that Britain was a province of Christendom, and that all our civilization arose from a known antiquity of two thousand years.' If this series is successful in hammering home this crucial, but neglected fact, Mr. Buchan and the many eminent scholars who are contributing to this series will deserve well of English readers.

Mr. Coulton has been chosen to write the volume on Crusades, Commerce and Adventure—a not easily managed trio. He has been largely successful, by means of extensive extracts from contemporary sources, in giving the atmosphere of the Crusading movement. By means of these skilfully chosen passages the whole enterprise comes to life, and he must be indeed an obtuse or sophisticated reader who can fail to catch the spirit and motives of that resounding chapter in the history of Christendom.

There is also an excellent chapter on the life and outlook of a typical Saracen warrior, illustrated by extracts from the autobiography of Ousama, the son of Mourschid. There is, furthermore, a good account, told mainly in their own words, of the travels and adventures of John of Piano Carpini, William or Robrouck, Odoric, and Marco Polo. In addition, there are some well-chosen illustrations—an advantage not often possessed by books of this type.

As a text-book, however, the book is of little use. The section on mediaeval commerce—a mere fourteen pages—is quite inadequate. It would have been much better if the author had confined himself simply to the commercial circumstances and results of the crusades. The result is the apparent implication that mediaeval trade was a mere by-product of the crusading movement—a misconception which would, of course, make Mr. Coulton shudder.

There is again a lack of proportion in the amount of space given to the various episodes. The First Crusade is allotted

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seventy-three pages, the Second four, the Third three, the Fourth has a generous allowance of fifty, while the remainder are given nine. Moreover, the reader is for the most part left in ignorance as to the fortunes of the Latin states in the intervening periods between the crusades, and little is said on the very important matter of their organisation.

Mr. Coulton also fails to bring out with sufficient effectiveness the problems and difficulties which the Greek Empire presented to the Crusaders, and he under-estimates, by implication, the issues at stake in the struggle between the Papacy and the Empire. He tends to under-estimate, too, the military effectiveness of the crusades by laying emphasis on the failure of the crusading states to maintain their position. The crusading movement, with its enthusiasm and inspiration, acted as a breakwater, which prevented the oncoming wave of Islam from submerging Europe. The crusades are to be judged as much by what they prevented as by what they achieved.

Within the limited space at his command, Mr. Coulton has produced a book which is both readable and informative. It is to be recommended as such and not as a text-book.

T.C-E.

CRANMER. By Hilaire Belloc. (London: Cassell; pp. 324; 15/-.)

Mr. Belloc's portrait of the English Reformation, with the poor, bewildered figure of Cranmer moving timidly in its very centre, is a masterly piece of writing. It is not a pretty picture—Mr. Belloc spares neither the Church nor the anti-clerical move in the political game, which subsequently developed into the Church of England. Pope Clement comes out of the whole sorry business with but little more dignity than Cranmer himself. But besides weakness and indecision, Cranmer had a treacherous mind and he did not scruple to betray his benefactors to save his own neck. Of his desertion of Anne in the moment of danger, even Sergeant remarks: 'His subsequent action with regard to his hapless patroness can cause no surprise. It seems hardly necessary to insert Cranmer's name, as has been suggested, in a list of saints of the English Church.'

So far, so good; but one feels that Mr. Belloc's portraits of Anne and the King are somehow distorted. Henry, a Catholic, firmly believing in the Real Presence, in character weak; Anne, a Lutheran, strong, masterful, and bad: such are the pictures. But the evidence seems to show her character as having been composed of vanity and shallowness, which together with judi-