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THE YEAR 1000 AND THE ANTECEDENTS OF THE CRUSADES¹

THE passion of the nineteenth century has been the study of origins. Our historians of the Crusades, seeking a starting-point, have been prone to find one (though not the only one) in a panic of terror said to have fallen upon Christendom as it neared the close of the first thousand years of its existence—a belief that the world would end with the year 1000.

Thus Michaud, at the opening of the century ; thus Archer, at its closing. Even Heinrich von Sybel, whose epoch-making history of the First Crusade opened a new era of critical study in this field, and who, in the revised edition published in 1881, could with just pride congratulate himself that in the forty years since its first appearance its main conclusions had been adopted by all leading scholars, and could hope that “perhaps in another forty years they will have the fortune to find a place in the manuals and the text-books,” tells us still in this new edition that

“As the first thousand years of our calendar drew to an end, in every land of Europe the people expected with certainty the destruction of the world. Some squandered their substance in riotous living, others bestowed it for the salvation of their souls on churches and convents, bewailing multitudes lay by day and by night about the altars, many looked with terror, yet most with a secret hope, for the conflagration of the earth and the falling of the heavens.”²

Alas for human fallibility ! The legend which he thus re-echoes had within the decade been already twice refuted, and with a conclusiveness more crushing than his own exposure of the legends of the First Crusade. In the score of years that since has passed Peter the Hermit and Godfrey of Bouillon have even in manual and text-book begun to take the background. Is it not time, now that three further critics have sifted, and with the same result, the legend of the year 1000, that it should vanish from our thought of the Crusades ? And could we find a better moment for its study

¹Read, at the late annual meeting of the American Historical Association, as the opening paper of a session devoted to the Crusades and the East.

²H. v. Sybel, *Geschichte des ersten Kreuzzugs* (2te, neu bearbeitete Auflage, Leipzig, 1881), p. 150.

than now, as we stand at the threshold of another Christian century and look across it to the near close of another millennium?

The earliest author, and the only pre-modern one, in whose pages has been found any mention of a panic at the year 1000 is the German abbot Joannes Tritemius, who lived and wrote just as the fifteenth century was changing to the sixteenth. In his chronicle of the world, the *Annales Hirsaugienses*, as it now lies before us, there is, in the passage devoted to the year 1000, this sentence: "In this year a terrible comet appeared, which by its look terrified many, who feared that the last day was at hand; inasmuch as several years before it had been predicted by some, deluded by a false calculation, that the visible world would end in the year of Christ 1000." But, as this chronicle, left in manuscript by its author, was never printed in full till 1690, as the abridged form earlier printed says nothing of this panic, even mentioning the comet in another connection, and as by 1690 the belief in such a panic was already in vogue from other sources, there is much reason to suspect that the sentence belongs not to Tritemius but to his seventeenth-century editors. Whether his or not, it should perhaps be brought into connection with an earlier passage, under the year 960, which tells of the appearance at the council of princes in Worms of a Thuringian hermit, named Bernhard, well versed in the scriptures and popularly venerated as a saint, who declared it revealed to him that the end of the world was already at hand. Some, says Tritemius, thought him an inspired prophet, while others laughed at him as a man out of his mind or swollen by self-conceit.

But the first book to publish to the world the millennial terror was the famous *Annales Ecclesiastici* of Cardinal Baronius, in 1605. Beginning with the year 1001 the eleventh volume of his great work, he opens it with the statement that this year, the first of a new century, had been by some "foretold as the world's last, or nigh thereto, when Antichrist should be revealed;" and he quotes in full from the tenth-century abbot, Abbo of Fleury, a passage telling how while he was yet a youth he heard in Paris a preacher declare that at the end of the thousandth year Antichrist should come and not long after him the Judgment,¹ and how once in Lorraine there had spread a report that when Annunciation Day should fall on Good Friday the end of the world would arrive. To this, from Sigebert of Gembloux he adds a list of the prodigies seen in the year 1000, remarking that these might well seem heralds of

¹ "De fine quoque mundi coram populo sermonem in Ecclesia Parisiorum adolescentulus audivi, quod statim, finito mille annorum numero, Antichristus adveniret, et non longo post tempore, universale judicium succederet."

such a catastrophe, then quotes from Gerbert a rhetorical allusion to the impending days of Antichrist and from Thietmar and Radulf Glaber such testimony to the corruption of the times as could well make it believable.

For what is found in a work of such authority one does not too closely scan the proofs. Thus set afloat, the story was sure to spread; and like all good stories, it grew. In 1633 Le Vasseur, in his annals of the church of Noyon, enriched it with the statement, which he thought he drew from Radulf Glaber—the familiar passage about the earth's "covering herself with a white robe of churches"—that the world's escape from the terrors of the year 1000 was the occasion of a great burst of church-building. Thus enriched, it passed into the great Benedictine works of the eighteenth century—the annals of Mabillon, the dictionary of Calmet, the *Histoire Littéraire de la France*—and into many another standard work of learning. If here and there a scholar like Fleury, Muratori, Voltaire, Gibbon, gave it no mention, the silence passed unnoticed.

But it was the Scotchman Robertson who made it a commonplace of history. In that luminous *View of the Progress of Society in Europe during the Middle Ages* which in 1769 he prefaced to his *History of Charles the Fifth*, and which, translated into all European tongues, remained for a century the favorite survey of medieval civilization, he not only emphasized the panic, bringing it into direct connection with the Crusades, but gave it a more scientific standing by citing in its support, besides Abbo, three medieval chronicles—those of St. Pantaleon and Godellus and the "Annalista Saxo." It remained only, in our own century, for that inspired Frenchman, Jules Michelet, to reveal its worth to literature at large. It is the keynote of that majestic prose dirge upon the misery of France under the early Capetians with which, in 1833, he began this period of his great history. And he lends it vividness by working into his narrative, after his fashion, not only from the chronicles, but from the Councils and from the preambles of charters,¹ what seem corroborative extracts.

Poet, novelist, dramatist, have since made the most of it.² Even the German historian-poet, Felix Dahn, was beguiled into devoting to it a cycle of lyrics; and the Italian poet-historian Carducci has depicted it in a prose poem more melodious than verse.

Yet protesting voices began to be raised. In 1840 the Italian jurist Francesco Forti doubted that the panic could have been gen-

¹ These, indeed, Michaud, the historian of the Crusades, had used before him.

² A long list, though by no means an exhaustive one, is given by Orsi, in his monograph later to be mentioned.

eral. In 1861 the French archaeologist Auber denied and disproved its effect upon architecture. In 1867 Olleris, the editor of the works of Gerbert, felt forced to exclaim: "One does not see that this fatal date then inspired in anybody the terror which was later singularly exaggerated by ignorant monks."

But it was not till 1873 that a scholar took the legend seriously in hand. Then, at last, in the *Revue des Questions Historiques* the Benedictine François Plaine put it to a sifting so thorough that his might well have been the last word.¹ Dealing first with the monkish historians of the later Middle Ages, he showed that the story was no exaggeration of theirs, since not one of them mentions it at all. Then, taking up one by one the contemporary annalists of the early eleventh century, Italian, German, French, English, he pointed out their utter silence as to such a panic, nay more, how much in them seems incompatible with such a thing. Next he discussed the true meaning of that handful of passages which to Baronius, to Robertson, to Michelet, had seemed to imply such a terror. True it is that the Council of Trosly reminded the bishops that "soon we shall behold the majestic and terrible day when every shepherd with his flock shall appear before the supreme Shepherd." But the Council of Trosly was in the year 909, its words specify no date for the end of things, and they were only such words as had been constantly heard since the birth of Christianity. The abbot Adson, it is true, wrote, about the year 954, a booklet on the Antichrist. But it was only a book of exegesis, meant to enlighten Queen Gerberga on an obscure point of the faith, and it nowhere intimates that the author himself or anybody else thought Antichrist at hand. It is true that Abbo of Fleury tells of a preacher at Paris who looked for the end of the world in the year 1000; but he tells us also that he himself refuted him from Scripture on the spot, and, though it is clear from the allusion to his youth that this could hardly have been later than the year 960, while Abbo wrote his narrative in 998, he nowhere intimates that the delusion was ever heard of again. True, he represents the people of Lorraine as later (it must have been about 975) terrified at the prospect of Annunciation's falling on Good Friday; but this conjunction was due in the year 992, and he not only tells us that the delusion was refuted (which was the easier because the two days had already fallen together more than once) but that it was dispelled.² Nor can it be denied that the monk William Godel, writing a

¹ *Revue des Questions Historiques*, XXIII. 145-164. Paris, 1873.

² His *Apologeticus*, in which these passages occur, is addressed to the King of France, and in it he is demonstrating his own orthodoxy by recounting the errors which during his lifetime he has known and fought.

couple of centuries later, does, as Robertson says, assert that in the year 1010 people in many places thought in their fright that the end of the world was at hand ; but the *whole* of what he says is that “*at the news of the taking of Jerusalem by the Turks* people in their fright thought the end of the world at hand”—a phrase which will hardly be taken too seriously. And, after all, the year 1010 was not the year 1000.¹

And Radulf Glaber—*Anglice* Ralph the Bald—on whom, above all, the tradition has been made to rest ? If anybody could know of a panic at the year 1000, it would surely be Radulf Glaber—a superstitious and garrulous old monk, who, in a day when monasteries were the only inns, and when his Burgundian home, on the border of three realms, was the highway for that army of pilgrims pressing ever to Cluny and to Rome, spent his life at this, that, and the other abbey, with ears wide open for every tale of prodigy, and widest for those of direful import. He believed, too, in the mystic worth of numbers, and the year 1000 was precisely the theme of his chronicle : he would relate, he said, the uncommon multitude of edifying things which had come to pass in the vicinage of the thousandth year of Christ's incarnation. Yet, alas, though his pages are alive with signs and wonders in Heaven and in Earth, and though not a few of these belong to the year 1000 itself, not even Radulf knows of any fear that then the world would end. The only passage savoring of such a thought, is his portrayal of that terrible famine which fell “as there drew on the thousand and thirty-third year of the incarnate Christ, which is from the *passion* of the said Saviour the thousandth.”

There remain the preambles of the charters ; but it was easy for Dom Plaine to point out that such preambles were but copied bodily out of a formula-book, and that the particular one cited in evidence—*appropinquante mundi termino*—belongs to the old collection of Marculf and has been demonstrably in use since the seventh century ; easy, too, to demonstrate that the formula continued in use after the year 1000, as before.

Turning then from the ruined legend, the Benedictine showed what a busy and aggressive time for Christendom was that year of alleged despair—when the wisest man of his day, Gerbert, was Pope, and the most enthusiastic, young Otto, was Emperor—when Hungary and Bohemia and the Scandinavian North were simultaneously turning to the Christian faith, and the Spaniards with renewed vigor were forcing back their Moslem neighbors. And nowhere in

¹ As for the chronicle of St. Pantaleon and the Saxon annalist, cited by Robertson, the terror mentioned by them occurred a century later, at the time of the First Crusade.

all this, or in what we are told in the lesser activities of church and society, the slightest mention of such a motive as the impending end of the world.

In fine, then, the sole contemporary evidence for a panic of terror at the year 1000 proved to be a statement that forty years earlier one Paris preacher named it as the date of the end of the world—a preacher whose prophecy was at once refuted, and, for aught we can learn, at once forgotten,

The refutation was crushing. Yet one convinced against his will might in this essay by an ecclesiastic for a conservative review suspect a partisan loyalty to the Middle Ages. And it must be confessed that its tone is a trifle polemic. But no suspicion of conservatism could lie against the next assailant. It was the anti-clerical Raoul Rosières, who five years later, in 1878, when about to bring out the two works¹ by which he hoped to help “declericalize” and “deroyalize” France, found it necessary to test this legend before using it. His study he published in the *Revue Politique*.² His analysis of the question, though slightly briefer, was not less effective. His results were the same. As he clearly knew nothing of the earlier paper of Dom Plaine and stood for so opposite a point of approach, the agreement of their conclusions was the more convincing.

French scholarship needed no further enlightenment; but the Germans, witness Von Sybel, were not yet all abreast. It was in 1883 that Heinrich von Eicken, doubtless already gathering material for what is still our best book on the medieval point of view,³ brought the matter of the year 1000, by an article in a German historical review, to the notice of German scholars.⁴ Though he had seen Rosières’s paper, he knows nothing of that of Dom Plaine; and even, he tells us, before knowing of Rosières’s, his own studies had lately convinced him of the baselessness of the tradition. It is especially from German sources that he now confirms and expands the work of the Frenchman.

The latest word in defence of the legend which I remember to have heard from any competent scholar was from Léon Gautier, lecturing to his class in the École des Chartes at Paris, in the win-

¹ His *Recherches sur l'Histoire Religieuse de la France* (Paris, 1879), and his *Histoire de la Société Française au Moyen-Âge*, 987-1483 (Paris, 1880).

² *Revue Politique et Littéraire*, 2d series, XIV. 919-924 (Paris, 1878). His article is entitled: *Études Nouvelles sur l'Ancienne France: La Légende de l'An Mil*.

³ His *Geschichte und System der mittelalterlichen Weltanschauung*.

⁴ *Forschungen zur Deutschen Geschichte*, XXIII. 303-318 (Göttingen, 1883). His article calls itself: *Die Legende von der Erwartung des Weltunterganges und der Wiederkehr Christi im Jahre 1000*.

ter of 1885. He admitted the refutation of the narrative evidence, but still thought that in the charters the formula about the end of the world grew more frequent as the year 1000 approached. But even while he spoke his younger colleague, M. Jules Roy, was preparing, for the popular *Bibliothèque des Merveilles*, a little monograph which should not only dispel such lingering doubts, but reach the ear of a wider public.¹ This interesting little volume, after dealing with the whole history of the fear of the end of the world and refuting the legend of the year 1000, portrays from the sources the real condition of the world and especially of France in the last half of the tenth century and the first of the eleventh.

At almost the same time a young Italian scholar who has since won eminence as an historian—Pietro Orsi—was making the year 1000 and its legend the subject of a thesis at the University of Turin. First presented in 1884, it was able, before its publication in 1887 in the *Rivista Storica Italiana*, to take cognizance of Roy's book, and is for scholars the most methodical and exhaustive exposition of its theme.² But, though more complete, its results tally with those of Plaine and Rosières and Eicken and Roy; and at the end its author can but echo their conclusion: "The terrors of the year 1000 are only a legend and a myth." Nor has any scholar, since the first assault, a quarter-century ago, cared to print a word in protest.

But, I hear you exclaim, you who have felt how awesome, even in these rational days, is the ending of a century, how could there help being terror, in that age, at the close of a millennium? It was, I am convinced, precisely this sense of intrinsic probability which made it so easy for scholars else cautious and thorough to fall into the error; and it may be worth a moment to ask why such a panic was not then so natural as at first appears.

First of all, and most important, the belief in the end of the world was already worn out. It had cried "Wolf" too often. It began with the very first generation of Christians, and sought a warrant in the words of the Christ himself. Almost the oldest Christian book we have—the second letter of Paul to the Thessalonians—is a protest against it. But it lived on. It found an echo in the Apocalypse and in the letters ascribed to Peter and to Jude. It sounded on through the Fathers, from Tertullian to Gregory the

¹ *L'An Mille: Formation de la Légende de l'An Mille, —État de la France de l'an 950 à l'an 1050* (Paris, 1885), 351 pp. There is at the end an excellent bibliography.

² *L'Anno Mille: Saggio di Critica Storica* (Torino, 1887), 62 pp., reprinted from the *Rivista Storica Italiana*, Vol. IV. (1887). In 1891 Professor Orsi threw it into briefer popular form for a lecture, at Venice, on *Le Paure del Finimondo nell' Anno 1000*. This was also published (Turin, 1891, 31 pp.).

Great. Augustine, like Paul, had to make a stand against it. The end was always coming, and never came. But precisely for this reason it grew at length a mark of orthodoxy to deny that the time of the end could be foreknown, and on the lips of all pious churchmen, as on those of Adson and Abbo in the tenth century, were the words "Of that day and hour knoweth no man," "The day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night." Even the credulous millenarian, whose own millennium was of course no thousand years of this world, but the thousand of Christ's reign which should follow it, yet who had built on the prophecies of Old Testament and New, and especially on the text that "with God a thousand years are as one day," a belief that his millennial Sabbath would set in at the end of the sixth thousand years from the Creation (and even Augustine believed that this was in his day nearly up), must have felt his faith wax faint as date after date inferred from Ezekiel and from Daniel passed by and brought no change. Bishop Gregory of Tours in the sixth century wrote his chronicle of the times already past *propter eos qui adpropinquantem mundi finem desperant*—"for the sake of those who despair of the end of the world." In the tenth century, then, it was only ignorant laymen like those of Lorraine, or some ill-trained visionary like Abbo's preacher, who could put faith in a date for the end of the world. And Dom Plaine may well be right in believing that it was only the revival of millenary dreams in the century following the Reformation which made it easy for Baronius and his contemporaries to fancy a panic at the year 1000.

It must be remembered, further, that the round numbers of a decimal system had much less vogue in the tenth century than now. It was the I, V, X, L, C, D, M, of the old Roman notation which governed the numerical ideas of men. Nor was currency, or weight, or measure, in the scales of that day a decimal matter. Under the influence of the Hebrew Scriptures even the decimals of classical antiquity had largely given place to the sacred round numbers of the Jews—the threes, the sevens, the twelves, and their multiples; and especially was this the case in all that pertained to prophecy.

Nor may one forget that the Christian calendar itself was yet a novel thing in the year 1000. The monk Dionysius, who at the middle of the sixth century devised it, had no authority to impose its adoption; and it crept but slowly into use. Monkish chronicles had early begun to employ it; but the first pope to date by the Christian era his official letters was John XIII., scarce thirty years before the year 1000; and "its use," says the latest and highest authority, Arthur Giry, "did not become general in the west of

Europe till after the year 1000"—wherefore the name of *millésime*, by which the French still call a Christian date. In Spain, indeed, it was not used until the fourteenth century; and by Greek Christians not until the fifteenth.

Even when it had come in, it was reinforced in all formal papers by other datings—by the regnal years of pope or emperor or king, by the year of the indiction, perhaps by others. Nor was it yet or for long agreed just how to reckon by the Christian calendar. Some preferred to count their years from the Lord's Passion, instead of his Incarnation. And if from the Incarnation, should that be dated from the Nativity, at December 25, or from the Conception, three-quarters of a year earlier? Dionysius himself would seem to have preferred the latter; and even to this day we cannot be sure whether he meant to place the birth of Christ at the beginning or at the end of the first year of our Christian calendar—in the year 753 or the year 754 of the Roman city. Throughout the Middle Ages there prevailed the widest variance as to when the New Year should set in—here it was begun at Christmas, there at Annunciation, yonder at Easter, in Venice on the first of March, in Russia at the vernal equinox, in the Greek Empire on the first of September, in Spain on the first of January. Florence and Pisa, agreeing in the use of that Mary-year which was still in vogue among our great-grandfathers in England and America as late as 1752, could yet not agree *which* twenty-fifth of March one ought to count from; and, neighbor-towns though they were, Pisa began her year just twelve months ahead of Florence. What havoc must this work with the punctuality of the end of the world!

And if through such confusion men's sense of date grew blunt, how much more through the needlessness to most people of dates at all—that is, of Christian-era dates. To us who at every turn are stared at by calendars and date-lines, who must every day of our lives again and again write day and month and year, it is not easy to realize a world wherein all this is the affair of priests and notaries. The ordinary man, gentle and simple, of the year 1000, could not have read a date if he had seen it. And, just as the hours of the day were to him not figures on a dial but those reminders which at prime and terce and sext and none and evensong called to him through the sweet bells of parish-church or minster, so his landmarks of the year were the great days of the Church, her feasts, her vigils, and her fasts—Easter and Ascension and Whitsunday, Michaelmas and Christmas and Ash-Wednesday—underscored and red-lettered for him by the solemn pageantry of worship. If Annunciation and Good Friday fell together, that was startling; but what recked he of years of the Incarnation?

Is it so strange, then, that the panic of the year 1000 is only a nightmare of modern scholars?

But there is another myth of the year 1000 whose relation to the Crusades is more patent. Among the letters of Gerbert, who in that year sat upon the papal throne as Silvester II., there has come down to us a curious document. It bears no date of year or place, and only its presence there suggests its authorship. "She who is Jerusalem"—for so the document begins—appeals to the universal church for aid. At first glance its fervid phrases seem a call to arms against her pagan spoilers, and in it scholars long saw the earliest suggestion of the Crusades. It was imputed to the pope among whose papers it was found, and some believed that it was the terrors of the year 1000 which had called it forth. It has, however, nothing in common with a papal utterance, and those who were content to count it Gerbert's were by no means agreed to count it his as Pope. In 1877 that arch-skeptic Julius Harttung (later Pflugk-Harttung) denied it to him altogether, advancing much cogent argument to prove it an effusion of a century later which had somehow strayed into Gerbert's papers.¹ In 1881 his view received the weighty adhesion of Count Paul Riant, who strengthened it by further argument.² Their verdict met acceptance at the hands of other scholars, including the authoritative editors of the Papal *Regesta*,³ though Heinrich von Sybel refused to be convinced. But in 1889 that prince of historical mousers, the lamented Julien Havet, propounded a more satisfying theory.⁴ It is not, he points out, a call to arms, but only a call for money—"a sort of circular, meant to be carried about by a collector of alms for the Christian establishments at Jerusalem." It may well have been written, Havet thinks, by Gerbert, but probably in the spring of 984, long before his papacy, and perhaps for the use of his friend the abbot Guarin, known to have been interested in this collection of alms for the Holy Land.

So passes one of the most famous of the antecedents of the Crusades. And with it, at the hands of the critics—they are again Harttung and Riant—has fallen the bull ostensibly called forth by the Moslem destruction of the Holy Sepulchre in 1010. Pope Sergius, addressing the princes and prelates of Catholic Christen-

¹ *Forschungen zur Deutschen Geschichte*, XVII. 390-396 (Göttingen, 1877). The article is called *Zur Vorgeschichte des ersten Kreuzzuges*.

² In his *Inventaire des Lettres Historiques des Croisades*, in the *Archives de l'Orient Latin*, I. (Paris, 1881.)

³ Wattenbach and his colleagues, in the edition of 1885. In Jaffé's original edition it does not appear.

⁴ In his edition of the *Lettres de Gerbert*, 983-987 (Paris, 1889), p. 22, note.

dom, summons them to a common expedition for the delivery of the holy places. This document, which exists in but a single manuscript, and that a transcript, though of the eleventh century, they deem a clumsy forgery, produced in the days of the First Crusade. As to its motive they are not at one. With it must pass from credence the expedition said by it to be preparing by Venice and Genoa,—as there had already fallen the legend (based on more misunderstanding) of Pisan exploits of this period in the Levant.

As the earliest summons to the Holy War against Islam, then, there remain the famous letters of Pope Gregory VII., in 1074. Of these (excepting that to the Countess Matilda) the genuineness is not questioned; but later historians, following Von Sybel, see in them less than did the earlier. What they mainly urge is the rescue not of the Holy Land, but of Asia Minor; their motive, politic not less than pious, is the salvation of the Greek church and the restoration of Armenian orthodoxy; their means, not an armed pilgrimage of Latin Christendom, but an invading army. And such as it was, the enterprise was with Gregory but a passing impulse.

For the conception, then, as well as for the initiation, of the Crusades proper we are brought to their very eve. To discuss the sources and the legends of the First Crusade is the task of another. Yet from this hasty survey of the havoc wrought by modern criticism among their antecedents, it must not be gathered that to present-day scholars the Crusades had no remoter causes. They are to be sought still in the ascetic spirit and the theocratic ideals of the age, in the love of travel and of venture, begotten in it by pilgrimage, in the over-population of the West, in the rise of chivalry and in the intolerable havoc wrought by its private wars, in the Church's assumption by the Truce of God to check and even to direct its energies, above all in those brilliant enterprises of the eleventh century, suggested or sanctioned by the Church, which appealed alike to the piety, the valor, and the ambition of every knightly soul—the deeds of the Normans in England, in Italy, in the Greek Empire, the beating back of the Moors in Spain, the African raids of the Italian sea-powers. Let, then, the century's last word on the deeper causes of the Crusades be that of Bishop Stubbs: "They were the first great effort of medieval life to go beyond the pursuit of selfish and isolated ambitions; they were the trial-feat of the young world, essaying to use, to the glory of God and the benefit of man, the arms of its new knighthood."

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