

Isabella of Spain, The Last Crusader. By WILLIAM THOMAS WALSH.
(New York: Robert M. McBride & Company, 1930. Pp. XIX,
515.)

Isabella of Castile, co-possessor with Ferdinand of Aragon, of the illustrious title "The Catholic Kings", was truly an heroic figure. Endowed with indomitable courage and perseverance, and "an intuitive sense that outran all calculation", she succeeded in the seemingly insuperable task of reducing the troublous realms of Castile to unified royal control and, with the coöperation of her consort she laid the foundations of a great Spanish nation-state. The amazing story of the queen, whose achievements outran fiction, has often been told but perhaps no more convincingly and sympathetically than by Prescott in his *History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella*. Yet Prescott wrote many years ago and since his time modern research has opened up treasures of source material unknown to him. Moreover, much of the material upon which he depended, like Llorente's *Inquisition*, for example, has been found to be unreliable. For these reasons it is generally agreed that Prescott is out of date. Mr. Walsh, however, advances as an additional reason for rejecting Prescott, "his incapability of understanding the spirit of fifteenth century Spain, because with all his erudition he could never wholly forget the prejudices of an early nineteenth century Bostonian." It is, therefore, with all the advantages of modern scientific research and with due humility free from "an air of condescension", yet objectively, withal, that Mr. Walsh proposes to write the "authentic" life of Queen Isabella whom he chooses to call "The Last of the Crusaders".

In expressive and entertaining style, Mr. Walsh recounts, with a generous interlarding of speeches and dialogue patently fabricated by imaginative court chroniclers, the remarkable career of the "Queen of queens" from the time when she "opened her eyes upon a muddled world", until she passed away to the accompaniment of unleashed elements. In picturing what he regards as an authentic environment in which the great queen moved, the biographer evidences remarkable ingenuity in piecing together widely scattered references, and these he liberally supplements with pure imagination. There is no doubt regarding the literary skill exhibited in the writing of this biography. But we are primarily interested in it as authentic history.

Mr. Walsh supports the novel thesis that the key to an understand-

ing of Spanish history is an appreciation of the Jewish menace. Consequently, in the light of this supposedly ever-present and real danger, which other historians, largely because of sectarian reasons, so he believes, have been too blind to see, he explains the course of Spanish history. The author is afflicted, it is patent, with a very pronounced anti-Jewish complex. It was the Jews, he contends, on the authority of the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, who invited the Moslem into Spain. But this was not, as he represents, part of a deep-seated plot to overthrow Christendom. The Jews were cruelly persecuted and in sheer desperation they were forced to seek succor. Moreover, who would deny that the Moslem would have invaded Spain with or without a so-called Jewish invitation? It is the author's contention that the Jews came closer to the establishment, by design, of a New Jerusalem in Spain than in any other place. If he had been as faithful in quoting Jewish historians on this subject as on certain others where it was convenient, he would have found that the principal aspiration of the Jews was only fair treatment, no matter whether it be accorded by Christians or by Moslem.

In making her momentous decision to establish the Inquisition, Isabella, says Walsh, yielded to "an overwhelming pressure of public opinion". There was no "popular" demand for the tribunal; rather, the Spanish people had to be converted to its support. It was the wheedling and arguments of fanatical clerics like Torquemada, who did not fail to point out the political and economic advantages of the Inquisition, which caused the queen to yield.

In defense of the Holy Office, Walsh asserts:

If an institution is to be judged not by the evils it caused, but by those it prevented, the verdict of history must be that in the long run the Spanish Inquisition proved to be a life-saving organism in the sense that it averted more deaths than it caused. Not only was Spain free from the terrible religious wars that cost thousands of lives in the countries where Protestantism obtained a foothold, but she escaped almost completely the terrors of witch-burning, which claimed 100,000 victims in Germany and 30,000 in Great Britain.

The Inquisition, it is true, saved Spain for the Catholic Church, but it did not prevent it from intervening in the religious wars. Moreover, the author ignores the fact that the Holy Office contributed materially to the enthronement of religious bigotry in Spain. And as for Tomás de Torquemada, he is represented as a kindly, gentle, man of prayer whom a monstrous league of sectarian prejudice has pictured as a

cruel fanatic. He was not a fanatic, says Walsh, for, according to his own definition of the term, "a fanatic is a man from whom some idea, true or false, has shut out part of reality". Torquemada insured the permanence of Isabella's life work, and for his self-effacing zeal in ferreting out heretics, Walsh intimates he was worthy of canonization.

The expulsion of the Jews in 1492 is also justified as a salubrious measure. Although the author is correct in his assertion that the expulsion was not responsible for an immediate economic decline of Spain, he does not recognize that possible adverse effects of the expulsion were counterbalanced by the inflow of America's riches. Spain's prosperity would have been more permanent and firmly established had the Jews been allowed to remain. In accounting for the decline of the Spanish Empire, Mr. Walsh contends that exile Marranos, to revenge themselves on Spain, diverted trade from that country to Holland, Italy, and England, and even revealed Spain's naval secrets to its enemies. Consequently,

the *conversos* played a large part in bringing low the greatest Catholic nation of Europe at the moment of its final triumph, and transferring the dominion of the seas and of the world politically to the anti-Catholic power of modern England.

Needless to say this is a thesis no reputable historical scholar would support.

The book contains many more novel ideas. For example:

Not only was [medieval] warfare less bloody and less protracted as a rule than in modern times, but there was nothing like the intense hatred of one nation for another. Christians hated Mohammedans, and with some reason, but there was generally a feeling of the solidarity and common interest of Christianity which has not existed since the time of Luther.

Is it difficult to recall wars, long and bloody, between Catholic princes before and after the rise of disruptive Protestantism? Here is another novel assertion: The Church, says Walsh, prohibited slavery as immoral. He speaks of "the traditional Catholic instinct that held in abhorrence the enslavement of human beings, a scruple which the Jews did not share". Did not St. Paul counsel slaves to be obedient to their masters, and was not the institution justified by St. Jerome? When Las Casas argued against the enslavement of the Indians, did he not suggest the introduction of negro slaves to America? The Church, it is true, worked for an amelioration of the condition of slaves, but as a matter of necessary policy it accepted the institution.

(See *The Catholic Encyclopedia*.) On the subject of slavery, Mr. Walsh says further,

It is significant that slavery persisted longest where Jewish influence was strong, long after its definite abolition in all Catholic countries.

Did slavery persist longer in England than in Cuba and Brazil?

The picture of Queen Isabella which one gets from reading this biography is that of a beautiful personality, a paragon of all the virtues, in short, a superhuman genius and a saint. She is described as a military genius of the first rank. "She saw plainly the A. B. C. of all military success: attack, attack, attack". Regarding her sincere piety there can be no doubt, except that, Mr. Walsh's assertions to the contrary notwithstanding, due to the persuasion of clerical zealots who were constantly in attendance on her, her religious zeal often assumed fanatical proportions. Yet, withal, she was never blind to the advantages of advancing material interests through ecclesiastical policy, for she said,

Though this business is the business of God and of the Church, to defend which all we Christian Princes are obliged, there might be mixed in it something of our own interest.

According to her biographer, "She despised all double-dealing"; "It was her nature to despise any taint of fraud"; and "It was typical of her to reject at once, on instinct, any suggestion of violence". How can all this be reconciled, only to mention a few prominent examples, with her violation of Columbus's contract, the more shameful repudiation of the capitulation of Granada with the Moslem, and the invitation to Henry VII. of England to attack his brother Christian sovereign of France? Mr. Walsh offers an ingenious explanation for the queen's departure in her later years from the strict path of truth and honor:

It must be said that at the period when this trait becomes most noticeable, she is exactly forty-five years old, a difficult age for most women.

"Columbus", says Mr. Walsh, "went not to find a new trade route, but as a missionary explorer". Why then was this not mentioned in his contract, and why, indeed did not a cleric accompany the first expedition? Columbus is pictured as an able navigator, to whom Martin Alonzo Pinzón was a hindrance rather than an aid. Scholars

are nearly unanimously agreed that the Genoese was a mediocre navigator, even for his time. The author is in error regarding the line of demarcation. Pope Alexander VI. did not "with remarkable impartiality" shift the arbitrary line to 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands. This was accomplished by the Treaty of Tordesillas. Students of Spanish exploration in the Americas will be surprised to read that

The armies of conquistadors who carried civilization later from the Atlantic to the Pacific, lived on the great droves of swine descended from the eight pigs that Columbus took on his second voyage.

In placing a final estimate on Mr. Walsh's *Isabella of Spain*, the reviewer is constrained to make use of the biographer's own words applied to Henry Charles Lea's *Spanish Inquisition*, "He is so violently prejudiced that his conclusions are untrustworthy". It is extremely doubtful whether the gains to historical science and to the Catholic Church through the publication of this book will be nearly commensurate with the evident labors involved in its preparation.

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Porto Rico, a Caribbean Isle. By RICHARD JAMES VAN DEUSEN and ELIZABETH KNEIPPLE VAN DEUSEN. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, [c. 1931.] Pp. [8], 342. Illus. \$3.50.)

Porto Rico: a Broken Pledge. By BAILEY W. and JUSTINE WHITE FIELD DIFFIE. ["Studies in American Imperialism", edited by Harry Elmer Barnes.] (New York: The Vanguard Press, [c. 1931.] Pp. xxxv, 252. \$1.50.)

Two candidly written books upon the same subject more unlike in approach, attitude, and conclusions than these are would be difficult to find. They illustrate strikingly the weight of subjective factors in descriptive and interpretative writing.

Captain and Mrs. Van Deusen know Porto Rico and its people more intimately than do Doctor Diffie and his coadjutor and they are conscious of no mission to prove a thesis. Their personal equation comes from long social and official contact and expresses sympathetic understanding rather than zeal for social or political reform. Loving Porto Rico as it is, they see it as an island rich in legend, romance,