CHAPTER ONE

The Muslim sources for Saladin and his deeds are, first, his officials and household retainers 'Imad ad-Din and Baha' ad-Din: the former with his history of the conquest of Jerusalem (which continues in fact up to the death of Saladin). The extremely artificial style overlays an eye-witness account of the events described whose value is being increasingly realized. The latter, the author of a biography of Saladin written in a less flamboyant style, shows a warmth of sympathy and devotion that rarely slips into unctuous apologia. The third and frequently quoted authority on Saladin is Abu Shama, in a section of his Book of the Two Gardens, which is an anthology containing extracts from 'Imad ad-Din (shorn of the flowers of his style), Baha' ad-Din and Ibn al-Adil. Its only real value lies in the inclusion of other sources now lost (Ibn Abi Teyy) and for its selection of acts and documents from the Sultan's Chancellery. Ibn al-Adil, although his attitude to Saladin was tainted by his political loyalties, preserves his unusual qualities of clear, informed exposition, using his sources with independent judgment.

The best all-round portrait of Islam's great champion is the one that opens Baha' ad-Din's biography, and it is reproduced here in its entirety.

SALADIN'S CHARACTER

(BAHĀ' AD-DIN, 7-41)

One of the authentic canonical traditions contains these words of the Prophet: Islam rests on five pillars: the asseveration that there is no god but God; prayer; the paying of the legal tithe; the fast of ramadan; and the Pilgrimage to God's Sacred House (at Mecca). Now Saladin was a man of firm faith, one who often had God's name on his lips. He drew his faith from the evidence duly studied in the company of the most authoritative

Hadith, mentioned several times in the following sections. They are sayings attributed to the Prophet and transmitted in a standard form, each with a chain of guarantors, the purpose of which is to establish its authenticity. The 'science of hadith' became an important branch of Muslim theology.
scholars and the greatest lawyers, acquiring sufficient competence to take his part in a theological discussion should one arise in his presence, although of course he did not adopt the technical language used by the specialists. The result of this was that his faith was free of any taint of heterodoxy, and speculation never led him into any theological error or heresy. His faith was firm, within the bounds of healthy speculation, and it had the approval of the highest authorities. The imam Qutb ad-Din an-Nisaburi compiled for him a catechism containing all the essential elements of dogma, and he was so deeply attached to this that he taught it to all his little sons so that it should be impressed on their minds from earliest childhood. I myself have heard him instructing them and heard them repeat it before him.

As for the canonic prayers, he performed them assiduously, and used to pray in public; in fact one day he remarked that it was years since he had performed them any other way. When he was ill he would send for one imam and would force himself to rise and pray with him. He was assiduous in his performance of the extra-canonic prayers; if he woke up during the night he would make two raka'at,1 and if not he would perform them before the morning prayer. He never omitted the canonic prayer except when he was at death's door in the last three days of his life, during which time he was unconscious. If the hour of prayer came round while he was travelling he would dismount from his horse and pray.

As for the legal alms-giving, he died without leaving a large enough estate to be subject to it, for his extra-canonic gifts had consumed all his wealth. Of all that he had been master of, he left in his treasury when he died forty-seven Nasirite drachmas2 and a single piece of Tyrian gold. Nor did he leave houses, estates, gardens, villages, fields or any other material possession.

1 The raka' (plural raka'at) is the complex of prostrations and elevations and formulae that together constitute the unit of the canonic prayer.

2 I.e. stamped with his official name, al-Malik an-Nasir (King-champion of the Faith).

As for ramadan, there were ramadans that he should have made up, because of illness at various times. The qadi al-Fadil3 kept an exact record of these days, which Saladin began to make up when he was at Jerusalem in the year of his death, persevering in the fast for more than the prescribed month. He had still two ramadans to make up for, that illness and involvement in the Holy War had kept him from observing; fasting did not suit his temperament, and God inspired him to fast in that year to make good his omissions. In the absence of the qadi I kept count of the days on which he fasted. The doctor was not in favour of it, but Saladin would not listen to him. 'Anything might happen,' he said, as if he had been inspired to pay his debt of conscience, and fasted long enough to discharge whatever he had owed to God.

As for the Pilgrimage, he had always wanted and intended to go, in particular in the year of his death. He made a decision to go then, and ordered the preparations to be made. We got together provisions for the journey and were ready to set out when lack of time and shortage of the money necessary to equip himself as became a man of his standing prevented his departure. He put it off until the next year, but God decreed otherwise, as often happens in the experience of men both great and small.

He loved to hear the noble Qur'an recited; he examined the imam whose job it was and required him to be learned in Qur'anic studies and to have a perfect knowledge and understanding of the text. At night, when he was in his room, he would ask anyone who was awake to recite two, three or four suras of the Qur'an while he listened. In public audiences he would ask whoever had been appointed to the office to recite twenty or so verses. Once he passed a child reciting the Qur'an to its father, and the recitation pleased him so much that he

3 Head of Chancellery and Saladin's intimate councillor; he is referred to several times further on.
called the child to him and assigned to him a part of his personal daily food and bequeathed to the child and his father part of an estate. He was humble and sensitive of heart, quick to weep, and used often to be moved to tears by hearing the Qur'an recited. He enjoyed hearing hadith delivered by a profound scholar of tradition and doctrine. When any were present at court he would summon them and listen to their teachings, and would make his sons and the mamliiks in his service listen too, bidding them all sit down to listen as a sign of respect. Or if a certain scholar was not the sort of man to knock on sultans' doors, but rather shunned audiences at court, he would himself go to the scholar to hear his readings. In this way he heard the hafiz al-Isfahani in Alexandria and transmitted many hadith from him. He loved to read hadith himself and often he would sit alone, send for the books of hadith and read from them himself. When he came upon a tradition containing an edifying parable it would move him to tears.

He venerated deeply the laws of the Faith, believed in the resurrection of the body, the reward of Paradise for the virtuous and of Hell for the sinners, and accepted all the teachings of Holy Scripture with an open heart. He hated philosophers, heretics, materialists and all the opponents of the Law. For this reason he commanded his son al-Malik az-Zahir, Prince of Aleppo, to punish a young man called as-Suhrawardi who called himself an enemy of the Law and heretic. His son had the man arrested for what he had heard of him and informed the Sultan, who commanded that he be put to death. So he was killed, and left hanging on the cross for several days.

He put his whole faith and confidence in God and turned to Him (for help). As an illustration of this I shall recount an incident of which I was a witness. The Franks—God damn them!—had come up and camped at Bait Nuba, a few days' march from Jerusalem. The Sultan was there, having posted advance guards in close contact with the enemy and sent out spies and reconnaissance troops. Thus he obtained the news of a firm decision taken by the enemy to besiege Jerusalem and give battle. This frightened the Muslims. The Sultan summoned the amirs and informed them of the critical situation in which the Muslims found themselves, and consulted them on the advisability of staying in Jerusalem. The amirs began by blustering, but their real intentions were quite different, each of them asserting that he would not in the least mind staying in the city, that the whole of Islam would be exposed to danger: they, they said, would remain, and he was to take a detachment of the army and go out to encircle the enemy, as had happened at Acre. His job would be to cut off the enemy's supplies and to harry them. Theirs would be to defend the city. On this decision the council broke up, but Saladin remained firm in his resolve to stay in the city in person, well aware that if he did not stay no one would. When the amirs had gone home, one of them returned to say that they would not stay unless Saladin's brother al-Malik al-'Adil, or one of his (own) sons, stayed behind to command and support them. Saladin realized that what they really meant was that they would not hold out, and this troubled and perplexed him. That night, the Thursday night, I was on duty beside him from sunset until it was almost dawn. It was winter, and we were alone but for God. We discussed this project and that, examining the implications of each in turn, until I began to feel concerned for him and to fear for his health, for he seemed to be overwhelmed by despair. I begged him to lie down on his bed, in the hope that he might sleep a while. He replied: 'Perhaps you are tired,' and rose. Scarcely had I returned to my rooms and settled to a task than dawn broke and the muezzin's call to prayer resounded. I almost

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1 In Islam a hafiz (from which comes the name of the celebrated Persian poet) is one who either knows the Qur'an by heart or is versed in hadith.
2 Philosopher and mystic of Aleppo who in 1191 fell victim to the intolerance of orthodoxy sanctioned by Saladin. This aspect of his real character bears little relation to the fantasies created by historians of the new enlightenment.
always made my morning prayer with Saladin, so I went back to his room, where he was washing himself. 'I have not shut an eye,' he said. 'I knew that,' I replied. 'How did you know?' 'I did not sleep either, there was no time for it.' We prayed together, and again took up the usual problem. 'I have had an idea,' I said, 'that may be of use, God willing.' 'What is it?' 'Turn to Almighty God, call on him and have trust in him to resolve this terrible dilemma.' 'How should we do it?' 'Today, I said, 'is Friday. Your Majesty should wash before going to the Friday prayer and should perform the public prayer as usual in the Masjid al-Aqsa, on the spot from which the Prophet ascended on his journey to Heaven. Offer certain alms secretly by the hand of someone you trust and then pray two raka’at between the muezzin’s first and second call, prostrating yourself and invoking God Almighty—on this subject there is an authentic hadith of the Prophet saying: "My God, all my earthly power to bring victory to your Faith has come to nothing; my only resource is to turn to You and to rely on Your help and trust in Your goodness. You are my sufficiency, You are the best preserver!" God is too generous to let your prayers go to waste.' Saladin did exactly as I advised. As usual I was at his side during the prayers: he performed two raka’at between the first and second call, and I saw him prostrate, with tears running down his white beard and on to his prayer-mat, but I could not hear what he said. . . . The very same day a message came from Izz ad-Din ibn Jurdk, captain of the advance guard, to say that the Franks were on the move. Their whole army was mounted and moving that day toward the plain. There they halted until the afternoon and then retired to their tents. On the Saturday morning a second messenger brought word that they had repeated this manoeuvre, and during the day a spy reported that a quarrel had broken out among the Franks. The French held that it was absolutely essential to besiege Jerusalem, while the King of England and his supporters did not want to put all Christendom in jeopardy and his own men in danger in that mountainous, waterless land—for Saladin had ordered that all the springs around Jerusalem were to be blocked up. So they went out to take council, for their custom is always to hold councils of war in the saddle, mounted on their horses. They decided to put the whole matter into the hands of ten men and to abide by their decision. On Monday morning came the joyful news that they had withdrawn and were returning to the region of ar-Ramla. I saw with my own eyes this evidence of Saladin’s faith in God.

His Justice

Abu Bakr the Truthful—God look kindly on him—said that the Prophet—God bless and preserve him—said: ‘The just prince is God’s shadow on earth, and his mercy. Those who act loyally to him, in private and before others, will be set in the shadow of God’s throne on the day when there shall be no other shade but that. Those who betray him, privately or publicly, shall be abandoned by God on the day of Resurrection. The just prince’s day’s work shall be held equal in value to that of sixty pious men, each devoted to worshipping God and working for the benefit of his own soul.’ Saladin was just, benign, merciful, quick to help the weak against the strong. Every Monday and Thursday he would give an audience and administer justice in public session, in the presence of the lawyers, qadis and scholars. He listened to the litigants, for all had access to him, great and small, old, hale and sick. Whether on journeys or at home he was ready to perform this office, always ready to receive the supplications addressed to him and to remove the abuses brought to his notice. Every day he ordered the pleas to be collected and opened the Gate of Justice. He never turned away anyone who had suffered injustice and was

1 The first Caliph, Muhammad’s successor (632–34).
seeking recompense. In a sitting held night and morning with his secretariat he affixed the sentence appointed by God to each wrongdoer. No one ever implored his help without his stop­ping, listening to the complaint, examining the case and receiving the plea. I myself saw a man from Damascus, one Ibn Zuhrur, come with a complaint against Saladin’s nephew Taqi ad-Din. He sent requesting the latter to appear before a tribunal, and although Taqi ad-Din was one of the people he loved and respected most he did not allow personal feeling to affect his judgment.

Even more important than this episode as an illustration of his justice was the case of the merchant ‘Umar al-Khilati. I happened to be at the tribunal in Jerusalem one day when this fine old man came before me with a legal document in his hand that he invited me to open. I asked who the defendant was, and he said: ‘The defendant is the Sultan himself, but this is the seat of justice and we have heard that you are not partial in your judgments.’ ‘What is the matter at issue?’ ‘Sunqur al­Khilati,’ he replied ‘was one of my slaves, and remained so until his death. He had control of large sums of money belonging to me, and at his death the Sultan seized them, so I am suing him for their restitution.’ ‘Old man,’ I said, ‘what made you wait so long?’ ‘A man’s rights are not annulled by his waiting to seek justice, and this legal opinion states clearly that this property is mine until I die.’ I took the paper from him and read it, and found that it contained a description of Sunqur al-Khilati and stated that he had bought him from a certain merchant in Arjish, on a certain day of a certain month of a certain year, and that he had remained in his possession until his death in such and such a year. It was dear to the witnesses of this docu­ment that he had never forfeited his legal right to the man. The document was perfectly in order. I was baffled by the problem and said to the man: ‘You cannot sue for restitution of property except in the presence of the defendant. I will inform him and tell you what he has to say about it.’ The man was satisfied and went away. Later on the same day I had an audience of the Sultan and informed him of the dispute. He found it very strange. ‘Have you studied the document?’ he asked. ‘I have studied it and I found it perfectly in order and correctly regis­tered at Damascus.’ Indeed a legal certificate had been attached to it at Damascus bearing the testimonies of distinguished wit­nesses in the presence of the qadi of Damascus. The Sultan was amazed. ‘Send for this man,’ he said, ‘and we shall contest the case before the tribunal. We must act in this matter as the law requires.’ Some time later, when I was alone with Saladin, I said to him: ‘That fellow keeps coming to me; the least I can do is to hear the case.’ ‘Send one of my legal representatives to hear his claim,’ said Saladin, ‘then let the witnesses make their depositions, but wait to open the document until the man him­self appears here.’ I did this, the man presented himself, and the Sultan called him to approach and made him sit down in front of him while I stood at his side. Then he descended from his sofa and came down to his level and said: ‘If you have a claim to make, make it.’ The man said: ‘I have evidence to prove my case,’ and asked for the document to be opened. I opened it and found that it was as we had said. The Sultan listened to the evidence, then said: ‘I have a witness who will say that this Sunqur was at that time my property and in my possession in Egypt, and that I bought him with eight others at a date earlier than the year stated here, and that he remained in my possession until I freed him.’ Then he summoned a group of distinguished amirs who were fighting in the Holy War, who attested to this and put the same case as he had, confirming the facts that he had stated. The man was speechless. Then I said: ‘My Lord, this man acted as he did only because he relied on Your Majesty’s benevolence. He came here into Your Majesty’s presence, and it would be a bad thing for him to go away disappointed in his faith.’ ‘This is quite a different matter,’ said
Saladin, and ordered that the man should be given a garment of honour and a large gift of money—I have forgotten now how much.

Is this not a fine example of his humility and submission to the Law, and of his mortification of his pride and generosity to one whom he could have punished with full authority?

EXAMPLES OF HIS GENEROSITY

The Prophet said: 'When the generous man stumbles God takes his hand,' and many other hadith speak of generosity. Saladin's was too widespread to be recorded here and too well known to need mention: I shall restrict myself to one significant fact; that he, ruler of all those lands, died leaving forty-seven Nasrite drachmas of silver in his treasury and a single piece of Tyrian gold whose weight I have forgotten. He used to give away whole provinces; when he conquered Amida, Qara Arslan's son asked him for it and he gave it to him. I myself saw a whole series of deputations appear before him in Jerusalem when he had decided to leave for Damascus and there was no gold left in the treasury to give these people. I was so insistent on his giving them something that he sold a village belonging to the public revenue and distributed to them what he was given for it without keeping a single drachma.

He was as generous when he was poor as when he was rich, and his treasurers kept certain reserves concealed from him for fear that some financial emergency might arise. For they knew that the moment he heard of their existence he would spend them.

I heard Saladin say in the course of conversation, 'There might be a man here who looks on money as one looks on the dust in the road,' by which he seemed to be referring to himself. He would give even more than the postulant asked, but I have never heard him say 'We gave so-and-so much.' He spread largesse with a generous hand, smiling as cheerfully on the recipient as if he had hardly given him anything. His gifts bestowed honour even more than money. The people knew what he was like and solicited his generosity at every moment, but I never heard him say 'I have already given over and over again; how much more must I give?' Most of the documents on this subject were drawn up by me and written in my own hand. I used to feel ashamed at the exorbitant demands but never of him, whatever I had to ask of him for others, knowing his generosity and the absence of any scruple or demur on his part. No one in his service ever had to turn to others for help. As for enumerating his gifts or giving details, no one could hope to get them straight. Let me just say that I heard his chief administrator say, when we were discussing Saladin's bounty: 'We counted the horses he gave away on the plain of Acre and the number reached 10,000,' and anyone with experience of his generosity would find even that a small number. O Lord, You inspired his generosity, You who are the most generous, therefore be generous to him in your mercy and grace, O most merciful of the merciful!

HIS COURAGE AND STEADFASTNESS

The Prophet is reported to have said: 'God loves courage, even in the killing of a serpent.' Saladin was indeed one of the most courageous of men; brave, gallant, firm, intrepid in any circumstance. I remember when he was encamped facing a great Frankish army which was continuously growing with the addition of reinforcements and auxiliaries, and all the time his strength of will and tenacity of purpose increased. One evening more than seventy enemy ships arrived—I counted them myself—between the 'asr prayer and sunset, and their only

1 In Mesopotamia.
2 Muhammad Ibn Qara Arslan, Artuqid amir of Hisn Kufa (1176–85).
3 The first hour of the afternoon.
effect seemed to be to incense him the more. When winter came he had disbanded his army and faced the enemy with only a small detachment of troops. I asked Balian ibn Banan how many there were—he was one of the great Frankish kings of Palestine, and had an audience of the Sultan on the day when peace was signed—and he replied through the interpreter: 'The Prince of Sidon (another of their kings and commanders) and I came from Tyre to join our army. When we came within sight of them we laid a wager on the size of the army. He guessed 500,000, I guessed 600,000. 'And how many of them are dead?' 'Killed in battle, 100,000; died of sickness or drowned, God alone knows.' And of all that multitude only a small minority returned home.

Every day for as long as we were in close contact with the enemy he made it an inflexible rule to make one or two circuits of the enemy camp; in the thick of battle he would move through the ranks, accompanied only by a page with a war-horse led on a bridle. He would traverse the whole army from the right wing to the left, creating a sense of unity and urging them to advance and to stand firm at the right time. He directed his troops from a commanding height and followed the enemy's movements from close at hand. He had certain sections of hadith read up and down the army's ranks. This arose from my observation that hadith had been read in every noble place, but one never heard of their being read before the ranks drawn up for battle, ‘and if Your Majesty were willing for this to be done it would be a fine thing’. He authorized it, and a section of the hadith was taken down to the troops, together with one who had made a regular study of them, and the reading was held while we were all in the saddle, sometimes advancing and sometimes at a halt between the ranks of the two armies.

I never saw him find the enemy too numerous or too powerful. He would ponder and deliberate, exposing each aspect of the situation and taking the necessary steps to deal with it, without becoming angry, for he was never irate. On the day of the great battle on the plain of Acre the centre of the Muslim ranks was broken, drums and flags fell to the ground, but he stood firm with a handful of men until he was able to withdraw all his men to the hill and then lead them down into battle again, shaming them into turning and fighting, so that although there were almost 7,000 infantry and cavalry killed that day God gave the Muslims victory over their enemies. He stood firm before overwhelming hordes of enemy soldiers until it became clear to him that the Muslims were exhausted, and then he agreed to a truce at the enemy's request. The Franks were also exhausted and had suffered even heavier losses than we, but they could expect reinforcements, as we could not, so that peace was in our interest, as emerged clearly from the developments that followed. When he was ill, which happened often, or throughout the most appalling crises he stayed firmly in camp; the camp-fires of each side could be seen clearly by the other; we heard the sound of their bells and they heard our call to prayer, until everything resolved itself in the pleasantest and most acceptable manner.

**HIS ZEAL IN THE HOLY WAR**

Almighty God has said, 'And those who fight for Our cause, We shall guide them in Our path, and God is with those who act with nobility,' and the sacred works are full of passages referring to the Holy War. Saladin was more assiduous and zealous in this than in anything else. If one said that once Saladin

1 Balìn II of Ibelin; one of the Frankish plenipotentiaries at the negotiations of 1192.

Greater detail of these affairs in later chapters.

2 Qur’an XXIX, 69.

3 More accurately wooden clappers used instead of bells by Christians in the East.
had gone forth on the Holy War he did not spend a dinar or a drachma except on the war or in gifts and donations one would speak the truth and one's statement would be accurate. The Holy War and the suffering involved in it weighed heavily on his heart and his whole being in every limb; he spoke of nothing else, thought only about equipment for the fight, was interested only in those who had taken up arms, had little sympathy with anyone who spoke of anything else or encouraged any other activity. For love of the Holy War and on God's path he left his family and his sons, his homeland, his house and all his estates, and chose out of all the world to live in the shade of his tent, where the winds blew on him from every side—so much so that on one stormy night on the plain of Acre his tent fell down, and if he had not happened to be in the turret he would have been killed. All this only increased his zeal, constancy and passion. Anyone who wanted to ingratiate himself with him had only to encourage him in his efforts and recount some anecdote of the war. Several books on the subject were written for him; I was one of those who compiled one for his use, containing all the laws, Qur'anic verses and hadith relating to the subject, with elucidations of the obscure terms; he often read it until his son al-Malik al-Afdal took it from him.

I want to tell what I heard from him personally on the subject. In dhu l-qa'da 584/January 1189 he took Kaukab and mustered his troops there while the Egyptians, commanded by his brother al-Malik al-Afdal, prepared to return to Egypt. Saladin accompanied him, to enjoy his company and to perform the prayer of the Feast at Jerusalem, and we went with him. After the prayer at Jerusalem it occurred to him to go on to Ascalon, disband his troops there and return by the coastal route, inspecting the territories as far as Acre in order to provide for their needs. He was advised against this on the grounds that once the army was disbanded there would be only a few of us left, whereas the Franks were all concentrated in Tyre, and we should be exposing ourselves to great danger. He took no notice, said farewell to his brother and the army at Ascalon, and then we all set off after him along the coast to Acre. It was deepest winter, the sea was very rough 'with waves like mountains' as God says in the Qur'an. I had little experience of the sea and it made a deep impression on me; in fact I thought that if anyone had said to me that if I spent a whole day sailing on the sea he would make me master of the whole world I could not have done it. I thought that anyone who earned his living from the sea must be mad, and that those who hold that evidence given by men who have been on the sea is invalid are correct in their judgment. All these thoughts were caused by the sight of the tempestuous sea. While I was standing thus Saladin turned to me and said: 'I think that when God grants me victory over the rest of Palestine I shall divide my territories, make a will stating my wishes, then set sail on this sea for their far-off lands and pursue the Franks there, so as to free the earth of anyone who does not believe in God, or die in the attempt.' I was deeply impressed by what he said, so contrary to all my own thoughts, so I said: 'There is no one on earth braver than Your Majesty or more firmly intent upon bringing victory to God's religion.' 'Why do you say that?' 'As for courage,' I replied, 'because this terrifying sea does not frighten you, and as for helping God's religion, because Your Majesty, not content with extirpating God's enemies from a certain part of the earth, wishes to purify the whole world,' and asked permission to recount to him the thoughts that had passed through my mind. He gave me permission and I told him, adding, 'this is a splendid
proposal, but Your Majesty should send your troops by ship, but yourself, the bulwark of Islam, should not risk your life.

'Now I shall put a question to you; what is the most noble death?' 'Death in God’s path,' I said. 'Well then, the worst that can befall me is the most noble of deaths!'

Behold, what purity of ambition, what a brave and burning soul! My God, You know that he expended every energy to make Your Faith victorious and fought the Holy War in the hope of Your mercy; be merciful, O most pitiful of the merciful!

HIS ENDURANCE AND DETERMINATION 
TO WIN MERIT IN GOD’S EYES

Almighty God said: ‘... and then they fought for God’s cause, and endured, and your Lord is forgiving and merciful.’ I saw him on the plain of Acre smitten with such a painful malady; boils covering him from waist to knees, so that he could not sit down, but lay on his side in his tent. He could not be served his food, since he could not sit, so he ordered that it should be divided among those present. In spite of all this he remained in his tent in the camp, close by the enemy, and when he had disposed his troops in left and right wings and a central block, in battle order, he (mounted his horse and) remained on horseback from the dawn to the midday prayer, and from early afternoon to sunset, inspecting his battalions notwithstanding the painful throbbing of his abscesses. When I marvelled at him he said: ‘When I am on my horse all pain ceases until I dismount’—a gift of Providence!

He fell ill when we were on our way to Kharruba* and had to abandon Tall al-Hajal as a result. When the Franks learnt this they sallied forth to strike a blow at the Muslims. This was the episode of the river: the enemy reached the wells below the Tall on the first day’s march. Saladin ordered the baggage-train to withdraw to Nazareth and as 'Imād ad-Din of Sinjar was also ill he gave him permission to withdraw with the baggage, but he himself remained firmly at his post. On the second day, the enemy moved in to confront them and Saladin, suffering as he was, commanded the army to prepare for battle. He set al-Malik al-'Adil on the right wing, Taqi ad-Din on the left and his sons al-Malik az-Zahir and al-Malik al-Afdal at the centre. He stationed his own troops so as to attack from the enemy’s rear. No sooner had he come down from the Tall than a Frank captured from the enemy army was brought to him. He invited the man to embrace Islam and when he refused gave the order for his head to be cut off, which was done in his presence. The enemy marched on and as they advanced, seeking the source of the river, he executed a deceptive manoeuvre behind them to cut them off from their followers. He would advance a little and then dismount to rest, putting a handkerchief over his head to shield him from the violence of the sun but refusing to allow a tent to be pitched for him lest the enemy should see it as a sign of weakness. Thus he continued until the enemy reached the source of the river, when he halted in front of them on a hill dominating the place, until night fell. He commanded his victorious army to pass the night sword in hand and he, with us in attendance, retired to the top of the hill where a small tent was pitched for him, and here we passed the whole night, the doctor and I tending and distracting him, he now sleeping and now waking, until dawn broke. The trumpets sounded, and he mounted and deployed his troops so as to encircle the enemy. They retreated upon the tents pitched on the western side of their camp, along the river, pressed heavily by the Muslims throughout the day. It was on this day that to gain merit in God’s eyes he sent forward his sons al-Malik al-Afdal, al-Malik az-Zahir and al-Malik az-Zafrī with the rest of the army, and went about sending everyone with him to the front, until there remained at his side only the doctor and

* Qu’ran XVI. 111.
* Between St. John of Acre and Haifa.
myself, the army inspector and the pages bearing the standards and oriflams, and no one else, but we were so disposed that anyone looking at us from far off would think that beneath those standards was a great force. The enemy continued on their march in spite of severe losses. They buried every casualty and carried all their wounded with them so that we should not learn the extent of their losses. They marched on under our eyes in ever more precarious conditions and halted by the bridge. We despaired of being able to attack them effectively in that position for they had closed ranks so as to present a close-knit line of defence. Saladin remained at his post, with the army mounted and facing the enemy, until night fell. He then commanded them to spend that night as they had the previous one, and we returned to the position we held that night and remained on the alert until morning. Then we returned to harassing the enemy as we had the day before, and the enemy continued on its march, fighting off continual guerrilla attacks, until they drew near to their tents and reinforcements came out to help them reach their camp. Behold the heights of patience and valour reached by Saladin! O Lord, You inspired his virtues and aided him in using them; do not deprive him of his reward, O most merciful of the merciful!

I was there when news came to him of the death of his little son Isma'il; he read the letter, and spoke to no one; we had to learn about it from others. He betrayed no reaction except that as he read the letter his eyes filled with tears. I saw him one night at Safad, which we were besieging, when he said: ‘We shall not sleep tonight until five catapults have been mounted.’ He ordered a squadron of men to work on each one and we spent the whole night on duty beside him, in the most peaceful conversation and relaxation, while reports came in one after another of the progress of the operation. At dawn the work was finished except for mounting the lever bars. It had been a very long, cold, wet night.

I was there too when he was brought the news of the death of Taqi ad-Din (his nephew). We were with a small detachment of men attacking the Franks below Ramla, and the enemy were at Yazur, a short gallop away. He sent for al-Malik al-'Adil, 'Alam ad-Din Sulaiman ibn Jandar, Sabiq ad-Din ibn ad-Daya and 'Izz ad-Din ibn al-Muqaddam, and sent the rest back to the tents at the distance of a bow-shot. Then he took out the letter, read it, and wept pitifully enough to move to tears even those who did not know the reason for his weeping. Finally, in a voice thick with tears, he said: ‘Taqi ad-Din is dead.’ He began to weep again, as did everyone else. After a time I took a hold on myself and said: ‘God forgive us for the state we are in: consider where you are and on what you are engaged, then leave off weeping and turn to other things.’ The Sultan replied: ‘Yes, God forgive us.’ He repeated this several times, adding, ‘Let no one know of this!’ He called for rose-water and bathed his eyes, then sent for food and summoned the others to approach again. No one knew what had happened until the enemy withdrew to Jaffa and we to Natrun, where our supplies were.

He was deeply attached to his infant sons and showed great affection for them. Nevertheless he endured separation and resigned himself to their being far away from him, putting up with the discomforts of a life of squalor when he could have behaved quite differently, in order to gain merit in God’s eyes and dedicate himself to the Holy War against God’s enemies. My God, he left all this in the hope that You would approve of him; approve of him therefore and have mercy on him!

**EXAMPLES OF HIS HUMANITY AND FORGIVENESS**

God has said: ‘... and those among men who pardon others, and God loves those who act rightly.’ He was indulgent to

1 Qur’an III, 128.
those who failed and slow to wrath. I was on duty at his side at Marj 'Uyūn before the Franks attacked Acre—may God make its reconquest easy!—It was his custom to ride on for as long as possible and then to dismount and have food served, which he would eat in company with his men before retiring to sleep in his private tent. When he awoke he would pray, and then withdraw, with me in attendance on him, to read a section of hadith or Law: among other works that he read with me was an anthology of Sulāmīr ar-Rāzī, including the four sections of the Law. One day he dismounted as usual and food was served. He was about to rise when he was told that it was almost the hour of prayer, so he sat down again and said: 'Let us pray, and then let us go to bed.' He sat and talked wearily. Everyone except his personal servants had withdrawn, when suddenly there appeared an ancient mamlik whom he held in high esteem, who presented him with a plea from someone fighting in the Holy War. 'I am tired now,' said the Sultan, 'present it again a little later', but the man would not comply. 

Saladin replied: 'It did not cost anything: we heard what he wanted, and we wanted to recompense him.' If a similar thing had happened to a private individual he would have lost his temper; and who would have been capable of replying to one of his subordinates in this way? This is the perfection of kindness and generosity, 'and God will not let such goodness go unrewarded'.

Sometimes, when the crowd thronged round him to present their pleas, the cushion on which he sat ended up crushed underfoot, yet he did not seem to mind at all. Once, while I was riding beside him, my mule took fright at the camels and kicked his thigh, injuring it; and he simply smiled. One rainy windy day as I was entering Jerusalem with him and the road was terribly muddy the mule splashed him and ruined all his clothes; but he smiled and refused to allow me to ride further back because of the incident.

Sometimes he was addressed in the most insulting manner by postulants and plaintiff's; his reaction to it was always cheerful and benevolent. Here is a splendid anecdote on the subject: The Frankish King's brother was making for Jaffa, while our army had withdrawn toward Natrūn, two days' forced march from Jaffa or three days' normal march. Saladin sent out a detachment of troops on reconnaissance and then set out for Caesarea to confront a troop of enemy reinforcements whom he hoped to drive off. The Franks of Jaffa, among them the King of England and some of his men, heard of this, and the King sent most of his troops by sea to Caesarea for fear that some harm might befall the reinforcements, keeping only a few men with him for he knew that Saladin and his army were far away. When Saladin and his army reached Caesarea he found that the reinforcements had already arrived in the city and strengthened its defences. When he saw that he could not touch them he left that evening, marched all night and reached

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*Qu'ān IX, 137.*  
Richard Cœur de Lion.
Jaffa in the morning. The English King with seventeen knights and about three hundred infantry had camped outside the city in one of their tents, and at dawn was attacked by our army. The King—God damn him!—who was excitable, valorous and shrewd in warfare, mounted his horse and planted himself in front of us, not entering the city. The Muslim army surrounded him on every side except that of the city and ranged itself in battle order. The Sultan gave his troops the command to charge, taking advantage of the propitious circumstances. Suddenly a Kurdish amir replied in openly disrespectful terms, upbraiding him for a fief that he considered less than munificent. The Sultan pulled his horse round on its rein in contempt, realizing that on that day absolutely nothing would be achieved. He left them and turned back, ordering that the tent that had been pitched for him should be struck. The army broke contact with the enemy, certain that today the Sultan would have several people killed and crucified; his own son al-Malik az-Zahir told me that on that day he was so afraid of his father that he did not dare to appear in his presence, although he had led a charge and pushed forward until Saladin had stopped him. The Sultan went as far as Yazûr, a short day's march; a small tent was pitched for him where he dismounted, while the army encamped under small shelters, as was usually done on these occasions. All the amirs trembled with fear, certain that they would be rebuked and come under the shadow of the Sultan's wrath. 'I could not bring myself to appear before him,' said al-Malik az-Zahir, 'until he sent for me. I went in and saw that his face was cheerful and that his affability calmed and soothed them. They left him to prepare for departure as if nothing had happened. You see what humanity he showed, so difficult to maintain in these times, and unknown in the stories of the kings of old!'

HIS UNFAILING GOODNESS

The Prophet said: 'I was sent to reveal clearly the soul's most noble qualities' and when someone seized his hand he did not withdraw it until the man let go of his own accord. The Sultan too was distinguished by the nobility of his conduct, the benevolence of his regard, his great modesty and extraordinary affability to his guests. He would not permit anyone who visited him to leave without eating with him, or to ask for something without receiving it. Everyone who appeared before him was treated with honour, even an infidel; the Prince of Antioch came to visit him, appearing unexpectedly at the mouth of his tent, after the truce of Shawwâl 588/November 1192 had been signed and the Sultan was returning from Jerusalem to Damascus. He came upon him suddenly on the journey and presented a plea to him, and the Sultan made him a gift of al-'Umq, a territory that he had taken from him in the year of his conquest of Palestine in 584/1188-89. Again, when the ruler of Sidon came to Nazareth I saw him receive him with reverence and honour and divide his food with him, even offering him the chance of embracing Islam, describing its prayers and exhorting him to be converted. He showed equal generosity to religious leaders, scholars and men of virtue and reputation, and directed us that every well-known religious leader visiting the camp should be presented to him, so that he could show him his hospitality. In 584 a man who was well known as a scholar and mystic passed by the camp. He was a member of a distinguished family, his father was ruler of Tabriz but the son had dissociated himself from his father's occupation and dedicated himself to the mystical fraternities, or other holy and devout men famous for their virtue and holiness.
himself to learning and acts of piety. He had undertaken the Pilgrimage and had come on a visit to Jerusalem where, having seen the Sultan's pious acts, he had the idea of visiting him. He came to our camp and entered my tent unexpectedly. I received him, welcomed him and asked the reason for his visit. He told me about it, saying that he had desired to visit the Sultan because of the noble and praiseworthy works of his that he had seen. That evening I informed the Sultan of the man's visit and he sent for him, heard some hadith from him and encouraged him in the path of virtue. Then we retired and the man spent the night in my tent with me. After the morning prayer he began to take his leave of me. It seemed discourteous to let him go without saying goodbye to the Sultan, but the man refused: 'I have received what I wanted of him,' he said. 'I only wanted to see him and pay him a visit.' Whereupon he left. Some days later the Sultan asked me about him and I told him what he had done. Saladin seemed upset that I had not told him of his departure and said: 'How could a man like that come and knock on our door and then go away without enjoying our beneficence?' He disapproved so strongly of my conduct that I was obliged to write to Muhyi ad-Din, qadi of Damascus, charging him with the task of searching for the man and handing over to him the letter enclosed in his, which informed the man that the Sultan was very sorry that he had left without seeing him again and that the friendship between us should lead him to return. One day unexpectedly he did appear again. I led him to the Sultan, who received him with joy and detained him for several days. After that he gave him a fine robe of honour, a suitable mount and a pile of clothes to take to his family, disciples and neighbours, as well as a sum of money for the journey. So he parted from him, deeply grateful and offering up sincere prayers to God to grant the Sultan a long life.

Once a Frankish prisoner was brought before him in whom the Sultan aroused such fear that the marks of terror and agitation were visible in his face. The interpreter asked him: 'What are you afraid of?' God inspired him to reply: 'At first I was afraid of seeing that face, but after seeing it and standing in his presence, I am sure that I shall see only good in it.' The Sultan was moved, pardoned him and let him go free.

One day when I was on duty I was riding with him ahead of the Franks when a sentry brought up a woman who was in a distracted state, weeping and beating her breast. 'This woman,' said the sentry, 'has come from the Frankish camp and asked to be brought before the Sultan, so we brought her here.' The Sultan told the interpreter to ask her what was the matter, and she said that Muslim raiders had come into her tent the day before and had carried off her little daughter. 'All night long I have been seeking help, until this morning our leaders told me: "The Muslim King is merciful; we will let you leave the camp to go to him, and you can ask him for your daughter." So they let me come, and you are my only hope of getting my baby back again.' Saladin was moved to pity by her plight, and his generous spirit prompted him to order someone to take her to the market-place in the camp to ask who had bought the child, repay him and bring her back. All this occurred in the morning; not an hour passed before the knight returned with the child on his shoulders. As soon as her mother caught sight of her she fell to the ground, rubbing her face in the dust, while everyone there wept with her. She raised her face to heaven, but we could not understand what she said. Her daughter was handed over to her and she was conducted back to her own camp.

Saladin did not like to treat his servants harshly even when they were guilty of serious dishonesty; two purses of Egyptian gold were taken from his treasury and two of copper substituted, and he punished the treasurers only with the loss of their jobs.

Prince Amāt of al-Karak¹ was brought before him, together

¹ Reynald of Chatillon.
with the King of the Palestinian Franks, both captured at the battle of Hittin in 583/1187, the famous battle of which we shall speak at length in its place. This villain Arnât was a powerful and violent infidel; during a period of truce between them and the Muslims a caravan from Egypt was passing by his territory and he broke the truce to attack and capture it, ill-treating and torturing the men and imprisoning them in narrow dungeons. When they invoked the truce his only reply was: 'Call on your Mahomet to save you.' When this was reported to the Sultan he vowed that when God put the man in his power he would kill him with his own hand. On that day, when God did put him in his power, he reaffirmed his decision to kill him to fulfill his vow, and sent for him and the King. As the King was complaining of thirst he had a cup of sherbet brought for him. The King drank and offered it to Arnât, but Saladin said to the interpreter: 'Tell the King, it was to you I gave the drink, and for my part I shall give him neither my water to drink nor my food to eat!' meaning that if a man had eaten his food honor forbade him to do that man any harm. After that he struck off Arnât's head with his own hand, in fulfillment of his vow. At the fall of Acre he released all the prisoners, more than 4,000 of them, from their dungeons and gave each a subsidy to enable him to reach his country and his people. So much I have heard from various people, for I was not present at this event.

Saladin was a pleasant companion, affectionate and shrewd, well versed in genealogy and the battles of the Arabs, their history and the genealogy of their horses, and the wonders and curiosities of the country; so much so that anyone who had the pleasure of his company would learn things that he could have heard from no one else. He put his companions at their ease and drew them out; he would ask one about one's health, how

one looked after oneself, how one was eating and drinking and all about oneself. Conversation in his circle was unusually honest, though no one was spoken of except in praise; he liked to hear only good of people and had a very restrained tongue; in fact I have never heard him speak ill of someone with enjoyment. It was the same when he wrote; he never wrote a line of insult to a Muslim. He observed all his obligations faithfully. Every time an orphan was brought before him he invoked God's mercy on his dead parents, consolded the child and provided the father's bread. If there were a trustworthy old man in the orphan's family he would entrust the child to him, and if not he secured to the child an adequate portion of his father's salary and entrusted him to someone who would see to his upbringing. The sight of an old man moved him to pity, and he would give him alms. He kept these noble qualities all his life, until God raised him to the seat of His mercy and the home of His grace.

All these are simply examples of his soul's lofty and noble qualities. I have limited myself in this way in order not to extend this book unduly and bore the reader, and have included only things seen with my own eyes or witnessed by trustworthy persons and checked by myself. This is only a part of what I myself saw when I was in his service, and is trivial compared with what others knew who had spent more time in his company and served him longer. This much however is enough to show the intelligent reader the purity of his noble character.

As is explained in the sentence that follows, he awarded the child a pension equal to a whole or a part of his father's salary, in the case of civil or military officials.

1 In accounts of the events of Hittin we find references to the dramatic episode described here.