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## ARTICLE VII.

## THE ORDER OF THE ASSASSINS.

BY PROFESSOR HARVEY PORTER, D. D.

OF all the strange and mystic sects the East has produced, none surpass the Order of the Assassins in fanatical zeal, boldness of design, and the ruthless manner of execution which characterized all their measures. It still remains a question, whence the term "Assassin" is derived. It is commonly referred to the word *hashish*, the intoxicating extract of hemp (*Cannabis Indica*). It is supposed that they used the drug to nerve them for their daring exploits, and hence they were called, in Arabic, *Hashishiyeen*, whence we derive "Assassin." This may be incorrect, but there is no doubt that our word "assassin" is derived from this order of fanatics whose deeds of darkness and horror overshadowed all Western Asia for more than one hundred and fifty years, and resounded through all Europe, and gave us our most appropriate word to denote swift and secret murder.

But the Assassins never called themselves by this name. The term which they applied to themselves was *Ismailians*, from a certain Ismail, whom they regarded as the origin of the sect, who will be mentioned further on. *Ismail* is the same as Ishmael; hence they might be called Ishmaelites,—a not inappropriate designation, since their hand was against every man, and every man's hand against them. Their Chief Ismail, however, has no connection with the Ishmael of the Bible.

They were called by the Mohammedans *Batiniyeh*, which indicates that they had one doctrine or set of doctrines for

the outside world, and quite another for the initiated. This was true. They held esoteric doctrines, which were taught to the inner circle of the initiated only, and which were of the most abominable character, while their exoteric doctrines were in general accord with the religion of Islam. They were in the outset a heretical sect of Mohammedans, but in their later development they became the bitter foes of Islam, and indeed of every form of faith except their own.

For a better understanding of the order of the Assassins, and its relation to Islam, we must glance briefly at the heretical sects that preceded it.

The first break in the united ranks of Islam occurred during the caliphate of Ali, the fourth successor of the Arabian prophet. Ali was repudiated by a large party at whose head was Moawiyah, the Governor of Damascus, and, after a long struggle, Ali and his sons were put to death, and the family nearly exterminated; but there was a remnant left, and there arose a party among the Mohammedans who claimed that the rightful succession to the caliphate belonged to Ali and his descendants. This party became known as Shias, or Shiites, to whom the Persians belong at the present day, and it has been from among them that the greatest foes to orthodox Islam have arisen, the Assassins most conspicuous of all. From among the Persians came the chief free-thinkers of Islam. In 758 A. D. appeared the Rawendi, who taught the transmigration of souls, whom the Caliph Munsûr was obliged to put down with the sword. Next arose in Persia a certain Al Mukanna who wore a golden mask, whence his name. He taught that God was incarnate in Adam, then in Noah, and in a succession of prophets reaching to and including himself. About the year 817 A. D. there appeared a certain Babek who taught the moral indifference of all human actions, and encouraged his followers to give free rein to their passions. In this they were the forerunners of the Assassins, as we shall see. It is not strange that Babek had

many followers. He attempted the overthrow of the caliphate of Bagdad, and the extinction of this pestilent sect is said to have cost twenty years of bloody conflict and a million of men.

About the year 891 A. D. appeared a still more formidable enemy to orthodox Islam in the sect of the Karmathians, who arose in lower Mesopotamia, but soon spread into Arabia, and inflicted defeat after defeat upon the armies of the Caliph. Their doctrines were a curious mixture of Islam, Magism, and Christianity. Their leader even pretended to be an apostle of Jesus, whom he called the Word. He also claimed to be the Mahdi of Islam and the angel Gabriel. The Karmathians professed an attachment to Islam and the Koran, but they taught that the latter must be interpreted allegorically, and, while apparently receiving it, they maintained doctrines wholly subversive of it. In this they were followed by the Assassins, who may in fact be regarded as their true successors. The Karmathians were hostile to the Caliph of Bagdad, claiming that their *Imam*, or chief, was the only true caliph, and must overthrow the false one at Bagdad. Hence followed the bloody conflict in which hundreds of thousands perished.

In 920 A. D. they attacked Mecca, and thirty thousand of its defenders fell before the city was taken. The Karmathians did not respect the holy places of Islam: they plundered the city, and carried off the sacred black stone of the Kaaba, which was only restored twenty-two years later at a ransom of fifty-thousand ducats. For one hundred years the conflict raged, before the Karmathian heresy was extinguished, or rather compelled to change its form, for it really lived on, and reappeared in all its essential features in the doctrine of the Assassins.

Egypt seems to have been the home of this new phase of heresy. The descendants of Ali—nearly exterminated, as already mentioned, and always persecuted by the caliphs,

who feared their dynastic claims, as being of the lineage of the Prophet through his daughter Fatima, the wife of Ali—succeeded in establishing themselves in Egypt, where they founded the Fatimite dynasty, which ruled from 909 to 1171 A. D. They called themselves the true caliphs of Islam, and they not only antagonized the Abbaside caliphs politically, but in doctrine they departed widely from the so-called orthodox standard maintained at Bagdad. As many of these doctrines were adopted by the Assassins, we will briefly take note of them.

There was at Cairo a great university, richly endowed, where these doctrines were taught; and the Fatimite caliphs fostered it, since it recognized them as the true successors of the Prophet. They were the true Imams, who alone had the divine sanction and inspiration, and hence their teachings comprised the true doctrine of Islam. These teachings were imparted in nine grades. In the first the student was pointed to the endless and inexplicable contradictions and absurdities of the Koran and the orthodox faith, as a preparation for the allegorical interpretation of the book, upon which the whole scheme of the new doctrine depended. The student was required to take an oath to accept without question all that should be subsequently taught. They were to acknowledge seven inspired Imams, the last of whom was Ismail, from whom the sect was afterward named. We need not follow out the teaching in all the successive stages, but note that the sixth taught that all positive religious precepts have no value in themselves, but serve merely as helps to a deeper insight into religious truths, and when this is fully attained they may be wholly discarded. All so-called revelations were but myths; heaven and hell have no real existence, and all actions are wholly alike in a moral point of view. Right and wrong do not pertain to acts, and hence all future retribution is nonsense. To the initiated, nothing is forbidden; everything is lawful. To believe in nothing and follow

one's own will was the only true philosophy. Such doctrines followed out to their logical results were well adapted to nourish the horde of fanatics who terrorized the East for one hundred and seventy years.

The Fatimites were not content to teach their doctrines at home, but sent emissaries throughout Western Asia to lure the orthodox to accept them, and it was there they were to bring forth the most abundant harvest.

One of these emissaries, or *Dais* as they were called, was Hassan ben Sabâh, the founder of the order of the Assassins. He was a native of Persia, who early became a convert to the doctrines of the Ismailians, and went to Egypt and studied at Cairo. He had already at home distinguished himself as a free-thinker. The Caliph received him with honor, but the jealousy of the courtiers made it dangerous for him to remain long in Egypt, and he returned to the East.

He was evidently a man of great magnetic power and supreme self-control. While passing from Egypt to Syria by sea, a fearful storm arose. The crew and passengers despaired of escape, but Hassan calmed their fears by assuring them that God would let no harm come to *him*, and they would be saved with him. The event justified his assurance, and they became his followers. He had evidently already determined to establish a new sect through which he would rise to power. He went to Persia by way of Bagdad. In Persia he commenced his work of making converts, ostensibly as *Dai*, or emissary, of the Caliph of Egypt, but really for his own purposes. He assumed the garb of a strict Moslem and passed for a saint. After gaining many followers in different parts of Persia, he determined to establish himself in some strong position, where he could more securely carry out his designs. He fixed upon a very strong place, in the mountains of Northern Persia, called Alamût, which means "the instruction of the eagle,"—so named, it is said, because the prince who first built a castle there was di-

rected to the spot by an eagle which lighted upon it while he was out hunting. Hassan took the place in 1091 A. D., and from this date commences his career of ambition, and ruthless war upon all rulers and all established forms of order. His aim was to destroy all order, all the foundations of society, and reign upon its ruins; a veritable Nihilist, the greatest Anarchist the world has ever seen.

But while pursuing such a policy towards the organized governments of his day, he had such a control over his own followers, that they implicitly obeyed him, even in the most trying circumstances. There was no anarchy in his camp, however much he sought to promote anarchy in the world around. Nothing more fully attests the remarkable power of the man than this fact; but it should be noted that the rank and file of the order were not initiated into the secret, esoteric doctrines, which abolished all distinction of right and wrong, and annihilated all principles of morality. All members of the order were sworn to implicit and unquestioning obedience to the will of the grand-master, who from his lofty and impregnable stronghold at Alamût issued orders that were promptly obeyed throughout half a continent. He soon acquired the title of *Sheikh-el-Jebel*, the "Old Man of the Mountains," a name that for a century and a half was regarded with terror all through Western Asia and even in Europe.

Besides Alamût, Hassan secured many other strong places in the mountains of Persia and wherever the order gained adherents. This was their constant policy, and it was the only policy that would secure the order in the course its chief had in view. He saw the futility of trying to establish an independent kingdom while the Caliph of Bagdad was still on the throne and powerful. The fate of Babek and the Karmathians convinced him of this, and he determined to pursue an entirely novel course,—that of ridding himself, by the dagger, of every opponent to his ambition, and thus by a

reign of terror bend everything to his will. But, in order to carry out this fiendish policy, he must secure himself from attack, which he might do by fortifying the most inaccessible positions, and holding them by garrisons of his most trusty followers. From these places he could send forth his emissaries, bound to yield blind obedience to his every command, who, utterly regardless of life, would carry the dagger into every court or palace where dwelt a prince or minister obnoxious to him, or into the strongholds of his enemies to strike down the chiefs who guarded them, or into the camp of a foe to assassinate the officers. His followers were always ready for these perilous commissions, being assured that death in carrying them out was but entrance into Paradise. They assumed every disguise to accomplish their fiendish purposes, and it is remarkable how generally they succeeded, even when the victims of the "Old Man of the Mountains" had become so numerous that men feared and apprehended the attacks of his emissaries on every hand.

It seems strange that men could be found to thus surrender their wills to the will of another; but religious fanaticism will go to all lengths, as we have good evidence in the history of the Christian church. The order of the Assassins has been compared to that of the Knights Templars, but the latter never yielded such implicit obedience to their grand-master as did the Assassins to the "Old Man of the Mountains."

When Hassan ben Sabâh had obtained many strong places and a numerous following, Malek Shah, the Sultan of the Seljukian Turks, became apprehensive of his power, and determined to destroy it. He had already reduced the Caliph of Bagdad to a mere shadow as a political chief, and left to him only his ecclesiastical authority. Through the wise administration of his grand-vizir, the renowned Nizâm-ul-Mulk, he had become the leading power in Western Asia, and he saw in Hassan ben Sabâh a rival whom he must crush.



He sent a force to besiege him in his stronghold, Alamût, Hassan was reduced to great straits; but one of his commanders in a neighboring fortress sent him three hundred men, and with these and his own troops he made a successful sally, and dispersed the besiegers. But the Sultan continued his attacks upon the strongholds of the order, and Hassan now determined on a master-stroke which would teach him and all other chiefs that they could attack him only at their peril. He inaugurated his policy of assassination by striking down the grand-vizir, Nizâm-ul-Mulk, who had guided the affairs of state under three sultans, advanced their power to the highest point, and gained a greater name than any of them. He was the greatest statesman of the age. In his youth he had been a fellow-student of Hassan ben Sabâh, and later had introduced him to the court of the Sultan, but Hassan intrigued to supplant his benefactor, and was driven from court. He never forgot the affront, and now had come his day of vengeance. The dagger of his emissary did its work, and the grand-vizir fell, no unworthy victim with which to commence the infernal role that from henceforth became the settled policy of the order. The death of the Sultan Malek Shah not long after, not without suspicion of poison, and the complete failure of his military operations against the "Old Man of the Mountains," exalted the latter more than ever, and gave him confidence in his policy. He pushed forward his operations to secure further strong places by treachery or by force, and in this he was successful. It should be noted that it was just at this time that the warriors of the West were dealing heavy blows to the power of the Turks in Asia Minor and Syria. Malek Shah died in 1092 A. D., and the First Crusade commenced in 1096. In 1098 Antioch fell, and in 1099 Jerusalem. The crusaders unconsciously favored the plans of the "Old Man of the Mountains," for, as the power of the Turks was being broken by them, he could more easily diminish their possessions in the East. He ob-

tained possession of a dozen or more castles in 1099 and 1100 A. D., and he had become so strong that he no longer confined his operations to the regions of Persia. The daggers of the Assassins now took wider range. In 1102 A. D. the Governor of Hums in Syria was struck down by them, and the order began to secure castles in that region. The first one mentioned as seized by them in Syria was Sarmin, about a day's journey south of Aleppo, and it became the residence of Hassan's grand-prior, Abu-l-Feth by name. Even the Governor of Aleppo became the friend and protector of the order, and connived at their dastardly deeds, perhaps through fear of their daggers. Modûd, the Governor of Damascus, soon after fell a victim. Fear of them became general. In 1113 A. D. the Governor of Aleppo died, and the people rose upon the members of the order in that city, and cut down without mercy some three hundred of them,—men, women, and children,—and about two hundred more were cast into prison. But the Assassins took ample vengeance, and in 1119 the Governor of Aleppo and one of his sons were assassinated. They grew bolder and bolder, and demanded castles from the local government, who stood in such fear of their daggers that they often yielded to the demand, or utterly demolished the castles lest they should fall into the hands of the order.

Meanwhile in Persia the reign of terror had been fully commenced. The victims of the "Old Man of the Mountains" fell like autumn leaves, many of them men of the highest rank. He did not always use the dagger. There were some among his enemies whom he chose to terrorize, and thus subdue to his will, so that they would not stand in his way. The Sultan Sanjar was taught that his life was safe only so long as the "Old Man of the Mountains" willed it. A slave of the Sultan was a member of the order, unsuspected by his master. He was commanded by Hassan to place a dagger by the Sultan's side while asleep. When the

Sultan awoke he recognized the sign and trembled. His fear was not lulled when he shortly received from the "Old Man" the following laconic message: "Were we not well disposed towards Sultan Sanjar, we should have fixed the dagger in his breast instead of in the ground." The Sultan was still further terrified by the sudden death of his brother, who was besieging Alamût, doubtless poisoned by the foe. Peace was made with Hassan forthwith, which not only confirmed him in his possessions, but assigned him certain revenues from the land.

But Hassan was not content with shedding the blood of his outside foes: he raised his hand against his own kin, seemingly from mere lust of blood. His nephew, the grand-prior of the order in Syria, and his two sons, fell by the dagger at his command. He did not intend that any of his successors should surpass him in iniquity. It would have been natural had he himself been struck down by one of his followers, but he was not. His death occurred in 1125 A. D., at the age of ninety. He had reigned as grand-master of the order thirty-seven years, during which he never once left the castle of Alamût, and twice only his apartments to show himself upon the terrace. His seclusion was designed to surround his almost unbounded sway with the veil of mystery and impress his followers with awe.

Hassan's successor in the office of grand-master was Bursurgomid, who had been one of his leading commanders. He carried out most fully the policy of Hassan, and the dagger was busy as before. Mahmûd succeeded Sanjar as Sultan about the same time, and thought to fight the Assassins with their own weapons,—the dagger and treachery,—but in these he was no match for the "Old Man of the Mountains." He had no such band of trusty followers. He succeeded, however, in capturing Alamût in 1130 A. D., but accomplished little more. The Turks of Persia and throughout the East were too much divided to make the united and steady

effort necessary to root out the accursed brood. The Assassins profited by their divisions to gain place after place, and plied the dagger with strange impunity.

A certain Bahram distinguished himself in Syria as a worthy follower of the "Old Man of the Mountains." He first put to death his uncle at Bagdad, and then proceeded to Syria, and at Damascus became a preacher of righteousness according to the creed of the Assassins. He gained many followers, and persuaded the Governor of Damascus to surrender to him the castle of Baniyas, situated on the coast south of Latakia, and this castle became the headquarters of the sect in Syria, 1129 A. D. Here the Assassins gathered from all quarters, and struck terror into the hearts of all neighboring chiefs. If any one was attacked by the Assassins, no chief dared offer assistance, lest he should be struck down by the dagger. Ismail, the successor of Bahram at Baniyas, gained even a stronger foothold at Damascus. He sent there a certain Abu-l-Wefa, who obtained great influence, and became chief judge in the city, and used his position of course to betray his patrons. He entered into correspondence with the crusaders to deliver Damascus into their hands in exchange for Tyre. The crusaders eagerly agreed, for they had long coveted the famous city of Damascus. It was a strange alliance, this of the dagger and the cross; but no party in those days cared much about means, so long as the end was gained. This famous plot did not, however, succeed. The Governor of Damascus discovered it in time to save the city, and both parties to it suffered severely. The adherents of the Assassins in Damascus were massacred without mercy. Six thousand—men, women, and children—perished at the hands of the enraged Moslems, and Abu-l-Wefa was hewn to pieces. The crusaders were approaching Damascus, all unconscious that their allies had been slain and their plan frustrated. They were careless of discipline, and dispersed among the villages for plunder, when they were

furiously attacked by a Moslem force from Damascus, and suffered a complete defeat. They obtained, however, the castle of Baniyas, which Ismail delivered into their hands, fearing an attack from the Moslems of Damascus. These events took place in 1130 A. D., the year in which Alamût was lost, as before mentioned, but both these places were soon after recovered.

Meanwhile the dagger was plied relentlessly in the East and West. In 1127, Kâsim ud-Dowlet, a distinguished general, was struck down in a mosque at Mosul by eight Assassins disguised as dervishes, of whom he killed three before he received his death-blow. The others, save one, were cut down by the attendants of Kâsim, as they doubtless expected to be. It was characteristic of the Assassins to glory in death met in executing the orders of the grand-master. The only one who escaped at this time was a youth. His mother, upon hearing of his escape, put on mourning; had he perished, she would have put on garments of joy. To such length could fanaticism go among the Assassins. The various methods employed by them in securing their victims attest their ingenuity and boldness. The vizir of the Sultan Sanjar was assaulted in a characteristic way. The Assassin who had been commissioned to murder him obtained the position of groom in his stables. One day he approached the vizir, leading his favorite horse, and as he neared him, he patted the horse on the neck, and dexterously produced a dagger, concealed under the mane, with which he killed the vizir.

The Governor of Damascus who massacred the six thousand adherents of the order, as above mentioned, was assassinated two years later. No prince was safe. The dagger lay in wait for them day and night. Among their most trusted servants might lurk adherents to the "Old Man of the Mountains." It is strange what a fascination the creed of this accursed sect seemed to have for the people of the East

in those days. It would be an unending task to enumerate the victims of the "Old Man of the Mountains." They fell thick and fast on every side. His arm reached over half a continent, striking high and low. It extended to Egypt, and with a kind of inexorable justice struck the Fatimite caliph, a member of the dynasty that had nursed and promulgated the accursed doctrines preached by Hassan ben Sabâh. The Caliph Amir and his vizir were assassinated in 1129, and, not long after, the grand-master turned his attention to still more distinguished prey. Heretofore the Assassins had spared the head of orthodox Islam; but in 1134 A. D. the Caliph of Bagdad fell a victim, and the Assassins, not content with his murder, horribly mutilated his body, as though to testify their scorn of his sacred office as spiritual head of the faithful. And yet they outwardly still professed the doctrines of the Koran and honored the Prophet.

The succeeding caliph was murdered by them a short time after his accession. Terror now seized the successors of the Prophet, and fear of the dagger of the "Old Man of the Mountains" imprisoned them in the palace at Bagdad. The faithful no longer saw their spiritual head. The second grand-master of the Assassins died in 1137 A. D., and was followed by his son Mohammed. From this time on, the office became hereditary. This was not the design of Hassan, the founder of the order, who intended that the best man in the order should be appointed to the office.

Mohammed continued the policy of his predecessors most fully. He occupied new strongholds, and plied the dagger without stint. Among the castles secured were Kadmûs, Kahaf, and Masyaf, in the Nusairi mountains in Syria. The last named became the chief seat of the order in Syria, and there reside the descendants of the Assassins at the present day, under the name of Ismailians.

With the accession of Hassan II., the son of Mohammed, in 1163, we reach a new stage in the history of the order. As

has been already indicated, there were several grades to which the members of the order were admitted as they proved themselves of sufficient capacity and trustworthiness to be advanced to them. The rank and file of the order, the great mass of adherents, were taught to follow the tenets of orthodox Islam, with the reserve only of perfect obedience to the grand-master, as the representative of the Imam who was to come and give the world a new revelation. Those admitted to the higher grades were alone taught the secret tenets, which inculcated the moral indifference of all acts, and the futility of all positive religion; in fact, the negation of all morality, a bald infidelity, or even blank atheism. These doctrines had been carefully concealed from the world and the great mass of his followers by Hassan ben Sabâh and his two immediate successors, but Hassan II. determined to cast aside the veil, and openly declare to all his followers their release from all religious observances and all bonds of morality, and allow them to give free rein to every lust and passion. He would only enjoin upon them obedience to him as the representative of the coming Imam, from whom he professed to have received a communication permitting him to make this declaration. This was done with great pomp at Alamût, and a new era was thus inaugurated, which Hassan hoped would increase his following and raise his power to the highest point. But he was sadly mistaken. Men are corrupt and easily corrupted, but they have a moral nature that revolts against publishing their corruption to the world. No creed that rejects all moral restraint has any chance of success, and Hassan II. soon found that this open defiance of all religion and all moral principle weakened his forces, and roused the world against him and his accursed crew. It is not strange to learn that Hassan II. fell a victim to his own teaching. His brother-in-law was his assassin. He was succeeded in 1167 A. D. by his son Mohammed II., who, although he preached the same doctrine of moral indifference

of all acts, took care to punish his father's assassin, who with his whole family was executed.

Meanwhile stirring events were taking place in Syria. Many more strongholds had fallen into the hands of the Assassins, chiefly in the Nusairi mountains. The grand-prior of the order in Syria was now Rashîd-ud-Dîn Sinân. The Sultan of the Turks was the renowned Nûr-ud-Dîn, who ruled Syria well for some years, dying in 1173. He was succeeded by the still more renowned Salah-ud-Dîn, or Saladin, who had been Nûr-ud-Dîn's viceroy in Egypt, and had put an end, while there, to the Fatimite dynasty, the former allies of the Assassins. Naturally the latter were not well disposed toward him, and determined to get rid of him after his coming to Syria and assuming the reins of power. As he was besieging Aleppo in 1175, Rashid-ud-Dîn, the chief of the order in Syria, sent three emissaries to assassinate him. They attacked him in his tent, but failed. Later, when Saladin had fully established his authority, he determined to root out the pestilential horde from his dominions. He advanced toward Masyaf, their chief stronghold, capturing and destroying whatever belonged to the Assassins, and finally laid siege to the place. Rashid-ud-Dîn tried the dagger again, and sent three more assassins to cut him down. They attacked him in succession, but in vain. Saladin seemed to bear a charmed life, and they all met the fate they had intended for him. Rashîd now began to despair, and feared the vengeance of the great warrior. He made proposals for peace, and Saladin granted it on condition that he should make no more attempts on his life with the dagger. When we consider who and what Saladin was, we are impressed with the universal fear of the Assassins that pervaded all hearts, so that even such a prince bargained for safety from their daggers, and let their chief escape when almost within his power.

Rashîd-ud-Dîn seemed desirous of rivalling the "Old Man of the Mountains" himself in dignity and influence. He



claimed to be an incarnation of the Godhead; he secluded himself from the vulgar gaze; he permitted no one to see him eat, drink, or sleep. He would take his stand on a lofty rock, and preach from sunrise to sunset. His eloquence is said to have been remarkable, and his influence over his followers unbounded. It appears to have been his intention to make himself grand-master of the order. He intrigued with the crusaders, and with the purpose of releasing himself from certain obligations to the order of the Templars, which he had entered into, he sent an embassy to the King of Jerusalem, pretending that the Assassins were inclined to adopt the Christian faith. The King and the bishop of Jerusalem were deceived, and sent an embassy to Rashid-ud-Din in return. The ambassadors of Rashid were cut to pieces by the Templars on their way back, and although the King tried to induce the grand-master of the Templars to punish the murderers, he would not, and all negotiations between the King and the Assassins came to no result. It is not strange that the "Old Man of the Mountains" should take vengeance into his own hands. There had been a sort of truce between the crusaders and the order since 1149, when Raymond, Count of Tripoli, had been assassinated, but now they were to be taught that the dagger was still active. In 1192 two young men of the order appeared at Tyre and demanded baptism. They received the rite, and entered into the service of Conrad, Marquis of Montferrat, Prince of Tyre. They remained in his service six months, devoutly praying to the God of the Christians. One day the Marquis dined with the Bishop of Beauvais, and as he was coming from the Bishop's residence he was assassinated by these two young men. Both were seized, and died under torture without revealing who had employed them to do the deed. Many charged it upon Richard Coeur de Lion, with whom Conrad had quarrelled, and by whose death Richard greatly profited, since it gave him Tyre; others charged the deed upon Saladin, and declared that he

had hired assassins to put Richard out of the way also. But all is conjecture: the mystery of Conrad's death still remains unsolved, and historians have condemned or acquitted Richard very much according to national bias. There can be no doubt, however, as to the instruments employed. They were adherents of the "Old Man of the Mountains," who thereby showed that his dread power still existed, and that he would use it against Christian or Moslem as his own advantage dictated. He still had servants ready to do his bidding regardless of consequences.

Two years after the death of Conrad, Henry, Count of Champagne, was passing Masyaf, and was invited by the grand-prior of the Assassins to visit him in his castle. He accepted the invitation, and was shown about the place with great civility. Standing upon one of the lofty towers, the prior remarked to the Count that his followers were more obedient than those of the Christian prince, in proof of which he gave a sign to two of them who were standing by. They immediately hurled themselves from the tower, and were crushed upon the rocks below. The prior then remarked, that all the initiated among his followers would do the same. "These," said he, "are they who will execute any command, however difficult, I may lay upon them and rid me of any enemy I may designate." In this, Rashid-ud-Din manifested the same authority over his followers as the first grand-master, Hassan ben Sabah. When Malek Shah sent messengers to the latter, commanding him to become his vassal, he called one of his attendants and ordered him to kill himself. Without delay the attendant thrust a dagger through his own body, and fell dead at his master's feet. He ordered another to throw himself from the parapet; he obeyed, and a moment later lay dashed in pieces below. Said Hassan to the messengers of Malek: "Go, tell your master what you have seen, and that I have seventy thousand such to do my bidding; let that be my answer to his command." It was this devo-

tion that enabled the "Old Man of the Mountains" to overawe so many princes.

Mohammed was succeeded by his son Jelâl-ud-Dîn, Hassan III., as grand-master of the order, 1182. He was opposed to the policy of his father and grandfather; for, while they had released their followers from the observance of the laws of Islam, he returned to the policy of the founder, and enjoined the strictest orthodoxy in regard to the observance of all the precepts of Islam. His opposition to his father appeared before the latter's death, and when he came to power he strained every nerve to prove to the Mohammedan world the reality of his faith, and his sincerity in keeping the law. But he could not wholly undo the work of his predecessors, and many distrusted his professions altogether. The true inwardness and spirit of the order had been laid bare, and most men could not believe that such a spirit and creed could nourish any sincerity save in iniquity.

The dagger slept, however, during the reign of Hassan III., but revived again in that of his son Ala-ud-Dîn. Orchân, the Emîr of Nisabûr, had ravaged the territory of the order in his vicinity. Ala-ud-Dîn sent messengers to warn off the invaders. The only answer the Emîr gave was, to draw several daggers from his girdle and cast them on the ground, as much as to say: If you care to use the dagger, I can use it equally well. But he reckoned without his host. Not long after, he was set upon by three Assassins and killed. They then boldly rushed through the streets of the town with their bloody daggers in their hand, calling aloud the name of their master. They next sought Orchân's grand-vizir in his own house; but, not finding him, they stabbed one of his servants, by way of leaving their card denoting that they had called in person. They then returned to the street, declaring to all who they were, until the people rose and despatched them with stones. At the same time a messenger from their master was approaching. Hearing of what had happened,

he halted, and sent to the vizir, asking whether he should appear at court or not. The vizir, afraid of refusing, replied, telling him he might come in safety, and when he arrived, treated him with honor, and granted his demand that the Sultan's forces should withdraw from the possessions of the "Old Man of the Mountains." He delivered up to him also a certain fortress, and promised to pay a yearly tribute. The messenger remained at court several days, and to show the vizir and his master how much they were in the power of the "Old Man," he informed him that several of the pages and body-guard of the Sultan were of his order. The vizir, greatly astonished, demanded proof. He was told that they would declare themselves if he would swear that they should not be harmed. He did so, and then the messenger gave a sign which brought forward five of the most trusted servants of the Sultan, who affirmed that they belonged to the order. One of them declared to the vizir that the only reason why he had not assassinated him was that he had received no command from his master to do so. The vizir in dismay made them swear in turn that they would not injure him, asserting that he would secretly obey the "Old Man of the Mountains" as he did his own Sultan. When the latter heard what had transpired, he compelled the vizir to put to death the five Assassins, and the chief of the pages for having admitted them into his service. The vizir obeyed, but he feared the vengeance of the "Old Man of the Mountains," and it was not long before a message arrived from him to this effect: "You have executed five of my servants to save your own head; pay for each of them ten thousand pieces of gold." The vizir complied. Thus dearly did princes and vizirs purchase safety from the daggers of the Assassins.

But although Ala-ud-Din could protect himself against outsiders, he could not against those of his own household. It is more than surmised that he had killed his own father by poison, and now he met a similar fate. His son hired a

Moslem to murder him. The chiefs of the Assassins had to learn that patricide begets its like.

Rokn-ud-Din, who succeeded Ala-ud-Din in 1255 A. D., was the last grand-master of the order, whose end was near at hand. It was the Mongols who gave the death-blow to this scourge of Asia. They overran nearly the whole continent, and were led at this period by Hulagu Khan. As they approached Bagdad, the Caliph, whom we have seen imprisoned in his palace through fear of the Assassins, sent messengers to Hulagu entreating him to wipe out this accursed order from the face of the earth. Other princes joined in the entreaty, and when Hulagu drew near the territory occupied by the Assassins, he sent repeated commands to the grand-master to submit. Rokn-ud-Din had a vizir named Nâsir-ud-Din, a distinguished astronomer, who had previously been in the service of the Caliph, but, regarding himself slighted by him, had joined the grand-master of the Assassins with the hope of inducing him to assassinate the Caliph. As Rokn-ud-Din did not seem inclined to do so, he determined to betray him into the hands of the Mongols, hoping to secure through them means of revenge upon the Caliph.

To further his plans he induced Rokn-ud-Din to negotiate with the Mongols, who were now plundering his territory. Hulagu would hear of nothing save the destruction of his castles and complete submission. Rokn-ud-Din hesitated, urged to do this by his traitorous vizir, and this proved his ruin. Hulagu sent him peremptory orders to appear before him; but, as he did not, he at once besieged him in the castle where he was then residing. The vizir soon delivered it into his hands (1256 A. D.), and Rokn-ud-Din, made a prisoner, was obliged to give orders for the surrender of other strongholds to the Mongols, and he even gave command to his distant officers in Syria and elsewhere to deliver the positions they held to the agents of Hulagu. The strongholds numbered more than one hundred. Alamût, the chief, resisted,

as did some others, the order of the grand-master, but they were finally compelled to submit. Alamût was found well provisioned, and might have held out long, and would have done so at an earlier day. Quarried out of the rock beneath the fortress were found great store-houses and vaults filled with wheat and honey, said to have been stored there by Hassan ben Sabâh from one hundred and thirty to one hundred and forty years before, and so secure were the vaults that all were still in good condition. Rokn-ud-Dîn, despised for his weakness, was murdered by the Mongols in 1257 A. D., and vengeance did not stop with him. His family was exterminated, and orders were given to exterminate the accursed race of the Assassins, root and branch. Executioners were sent in every direction, and any one of them they could apprehend was despatched on the spot. Neither age nor sex was spared. Thus did long-suffering humanity wreak vengeance upon the order that had held so much of the world in terror for one hundred and fifty years.

The Assassins were blotted out in the East, but in Syria they held out some years longer. The Mongols could not for some time proceed against them there. Meanwhile the Mamluke Sultan of Egypt, Bibars, gained the supremacy in Syria, and the chief of the Assassins, Nejm-ud-Dîn, gave allegiance to him, and consented to share his authority with the lieutenant of Bibars. The latter gradually obtained possession of all their fortresses, but did not exterminate them. The Mamlukes preferred to use them for their own purposes, and accomplish by means of their daggers what they could not by the sword.

In 1326 A. D., Mohammed, the son of Bibars, sent more than thirty Assassins from Syria to Tabriz to destroy the Emir Kara Sonkor, with others, but they failed, and some of them were seized and executed. But Mohammed did not give up his design against the Mongol rulers, his rivals, and hired other Assassins from Masyaf. Kara Sonkor was again

attacked, but again escaped. One of the assassins fled, a second killed himself, and a third died under torture, without revealing his accomplices. Another Assassin, sent to Bagdad, struck down the governor of the city in broad daylight, and escaped to tell Mohammed of his success. Kara Sonkor, however, seemed to bear a charmed life. Assassin after assassin attempted his life, but in vain. If we can believe Macrisi, one hundred and twenty-four perished in the attempt to assassinate him. The Assassins of Masyaf seem to have been as devoted to their accursed work as those of Alamût, but less skilful.

As they lost political power they resorted to intrigue, keeping up the organization in the hope that some turn of fortune would again give them the power they had lost, but fortune never smiled upon them a second time and they rapidly sunk into one of the insignificant heretical sects of Islam. The remnants of the order still exist in Syria at Masyaf and a few other places, but the Nusairi, or Ausairi, have crowded them out of much of their former territory. In 1809 they took Masyaf, plundered and killed many of the Ismailians, as they have always called themselves, and as they are now known. The Governor of Hamath did not wish to allow the Nusairi to become too powerful, as they are now far more formidable to the government than the Ismailians, and hence he reinstated the latter at Masyaf, and there they still reside, a miserable remnant of that once powerful order which for a century and a half played one of the strangest roles in history.