

CHAPTER SEVEN

SULTAN OF EGYPT

A QUARREL between a vizier who had been deposed and his successful rival led to Shirkuh's first expedition to Egypt. Shower, the unlucky one, came to Nur ed-din with the promise of great reward if he would put him back in power, but it was Shirkuh who overcame the Syrian Sultan's reluctance to go so far afield while he still was occupied with the Franks. The spirited old soldier, ever eager for new adventure and ambitious to reach even greater power than he possessed, saw a brilliant opening for himself in Shower's proposition.

Egypt, after centuries of greatness under the Fatimite regime, was now in her decline. As the orthodox Caliph at Bagdad had been compelled to relinquish all real power and content himself with the dignities and luxuries appertaining to his religious supremacy, so the heretical Caliph, holding the support of the Shiites because of his alleged descent from Fatima, daughter of the Prophet, and Ali, her husband, had become a mere puppet in the hands of his vizier. The country was ripe fruit, waiting for the first bidder with courage.