

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

DEATH OF SALADIN

SALADIN was twenty-seven when he accompanied his uncle on the first expedition to Egypt. He was fifty-five when the peace pact with Richard ended his military career. Twenty-eight years of hard fighting — not continuous, but with no long gaps between — was the price he had to pay for restoring to a united Islam the supremacy of the Holy Land.

Balian of Ibelin, who was present when the treaty of peace was signed, paid an unconscious tribute to the ability shown by Saladin as champion of Islam when he said:

“ Know that nobody among the Moslems has done such evil as thou to Christianity. Never in my time have so many Franks perished as now. We have counted the warriors who embarked to come and find thee, and they numbered six hundred thousand. Of each ten no more than one has returned to his country.”

But the victory had been costly. It left Saladin broken in health, weary and worn.

His return to Damascus inspired a great demonstration of enthusiasm and a spontaneous outburst of