

NATIONAL TEMPLAR

Testament
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The Story 95251

OF THE
MEDIÆVAL ORDER

OF Knights Templars:

BY
S. P. Thompson, B.A.



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A little later, in the year 1119, or twenty years after the capture of Jerusalem, nine French Knights of noble lineage, the chief of whom were Hugo des Paganes and Godfrey de St. Omer, visited the Holy City, and established themselves as a brotherhood, sworn to aid the brethren of the Hospital in succouring the Christian pilgrims, and more especially to maintain a free passage to the Jordan from the city. Thus the more exclusively military character of the Order arose from the latter circumstance; for the incursions of the Bedouins and Turks upon the public roads necessitated the assumption of the knightly character by the companions of those whose custom had been to lay down their arms on entering the more peaceful profession of Brethren of the Hospital. The Patriarch of Jerusalem, King Baldwin II, was not slow to perceive the superior advantages of the new Order, to whom he rendered much assistance. Having no funds to build themselves a church, Baldwin permitted them the use of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and gave up to them a portion of his palace for their residence. Their arms were deposited at the adjoining church and convent of the *Temple*, a building which had been raised upon the well-known site of the former magnificent *Temple of King Solomon*. Hence arose their designation of *Templars*. Such was the origin of the Order of Knights Templar: the Poor Fought for the soldiers of Christ, or Poor Brethren of the Temple of Solomon, as they styled themselves.

Hugo, the Master of the Temple, was also desired by Baldwin on a message to Pope Honorius, and he bore a letter to the Abbey of Clairvaux, where, even then, Bernard was exercising the influence that a few years later impelled Europe to a second Crusade. The letter ran as follows—"Baldwin to the Venerable Father Bernard: The Brothers of the Temple whom the Lord hath deigned to raise up, desire to obtain a rule for their particular guidance." It went on to point out that "the Statute of his we ask of you should be so ordered and arranged as to be

reconcilable with the tumult of the camp and the profession of arms." Accordingly a series of Statutes to the number of seventy-two were drawn up by St Bernard, with an additional prologue addressed to such as were willing to turn away from vanities. They have been well characterised as austere, religious, and gloomy; in many of their provisions bearing a close resemblance to those in use in the Benedictine cloisters where Bernard held sway. Some of the rules bear witness to the influence of a later hand, but exhibit traces of Cistercian reform, pointing to Bernard as their indisputable author. The Statutes, as finally accepted by the Council of Troyes, bear the title "Regula Pauperum Commilitonum Christi et Templi Salomonis." ("The Rules of the Poor Fellow-soldiery of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon.") They display singular ingenuity in the methods of combining the objects of military and religious life. Every Knight must attend to the holy hours, or must repeat thirteen pater-nosters for missing matins, nine for vespers, and seven for any other hour. Knights on military duty might chant thirteen prayers instead of matins. They were permitted to sit during some of the prayers that they might not weary themselves, but they must stand at the Te Deum, and at the recitations of the Gospels and the Lauds. At their meals holy reading was to take place; they might eat meat only three times in the week; Knights and Chaplains might eat of two dishes on Sunday, while the squires and servants were permitted but one. No furs might be worn, except the skins of lambs or sheep, and these only in winter-time. Ornaments of dress, boots and shoes heathenishly curved up at the toes, hawking, and shooting with crossbow were prohibited. A Knight might not even go in company with one that carried a hawk. Permission of the Master, or his Procurator, was necessary to receive any message, letter, or present; nor might they, except with his leave, enter the city, unless by night, to visit the Holy Sepulchre. A few short extracts from the Statutes may be of interest.

Pagans, the Master, shared one horse between himself and De St. Omer: a circumstance commemorated in an ancient seal of the Order, which depicts two Knights riding one horse, the one behind the other. But the poverty of the Order was not destined to be lasting. The "poverty" practised by the monastic orders was of three grades or varieties. The first or highest grade of poverty permitted no property whatsoever, either to an individual or to the community. A second or medium species, while allowing no individual to hold property, permitted the community to be enriched to any extent: all sharing equally in the rights of possession. The third and lowest sort of poverty allowed separate property in a few articles of food and dress, all else being common. The poverty of the Templars was of the second grade: hence we see the force of the regulation that no Knight might receive a present, even from a parent, for himself, except with the express permission of the Master. Their poverty was to be individual, voluntary; their obedience to the Master's word, absolute and unquestioning; their chastity, austere and rigorous. The Statutes, as confirmed by the decrees of Pope Honorius and of the Council of Troyes, direct that the dress of the Knights should be of plain white burel-cloth, of a simple cut. To this dress, a few years later, a red eight-pointed cross—the symbol of martyrdom—worn on the left breast, was added by Pope Eugenius III. He also bestowed some additional privileges and many gifts upon the Order: and from this time they were popularly known as Red Cross Knights, or Red Friars. By their dress they were readily distinguished from the Hospitallers, who wore a similar cross of white upon a mantle of black. In 1168, under the government of Gilbert of Assalit, the Brethren of the Hospital re-modelled their Order, with the object of placing it upon a more exclusively military basis. So popular indeed had this style of association become, that in 1190 a third Brotherhood was founded, afterwards known as the Teutonic Order. Its history is

comparatively destitute of interest, as it only emerged into importance at a later date, when, after the fall of the kingdom of Jerusalem, its energies were diverted into a crusade along the shores of the Baltic, to carry the message of Christianity by fire and sword among the maritime lands of Prussia. One feature only is worthy of note; namely, that its adherents were drawn solely from the bourgeois classes and not from the nobility. It survived the shock of the Reformation, and still exhibited some pretensions under the Holy Roman Empire, until finally extinguished and dissolved by Napoleon the First.

To the growing popularity of the movement, St. Bernard added the powerful advocacy of his pen. At the request of Des Paganes he wrote an "Exhortation to the Soldiers of the Temple in praise of the new chivalry." This document consists of fourteen chapters, and is addressed "To Hugo, Knight of Christ, and Master of the Temple of Christ." The earlier portion contains an account of the Order. "They dwell together," he says, "without wives, without children, without separate property of any kind, in one house, under one government, endeavouring to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace. With them there is no distinction of persons, respect being paid to the best and most virtuous, not to those of highest rank. They detest cards and dice; they avoid the sports of the field, are never combed, seldom washed; but appear rather with rough, unkempt hair, foul with dust; their skins tanned by the heat of the sun and of their coats of mail. Such hath God chosen for His own, and collected together as His ministers from the ends of the earth." A long description of the Temple and Church of the Holy Sepulchre, contrasting the poverty of them with the former magnificence of the structures that bore the name, follows this account. Then the devotion and enthusiasm of the Order are noted; and lastly the Holy City is congratulated on the virtues of its defenders. "They emulously honour the Temple of God

The heroism of the Templars not only brought them a great popularity, but it received many powerful material acknowledgments. The powers and privileges possessed by the Knights were now increased by a Bull, granted by Pope Alexander in 1171, which is commonly known by the words in which it begins, "Omne optimum datum." This document declared that no ecclesiastic or secular person had any right to exact from the Master or Brethren of the Temple oaths, guarantees, or any such securities as are required from the laity. It prohibited Knights from leaving the Order, and gave them permission to admit clergy as affiliated brothers, with the privilege of performing the rites of the church, and to construct oratories even in interdicted towns and countries. A similar Bull, granted by Alexander to Bertran de Blanquefort, bears date 1162, but both seem merely to have embodied privileges previously acknowledged. Up to this time there had been no distinction of persons amongst them. Originally none could enter the Order who had not first received the honour of knighthood; hence they all were at first men of noble birth. But now the increasing prosperity and luxury of the Order added two other classes. Priests, admitted that the Knights might more commodiously hear divine service and receive the sacraments; and Serving-brethren, who were admitted to a lower dignity, and who acted as attendants on the Knights, and were distinguished by a brown dress.

Over these the supreme commanding officer was the Grand Master, in war the commander-in-chief, and in council the president. In his hands was the whole patronage of the Order, as vicegerent of the Pope, and spiritual head of the associated clergy. He was, however, much guided and controlled by the Chapter, without whose consent he was never permitted to draw out or expend the money of the Order. His residence was at Jerusalem, afterwards at Acre, and finally at Cyprus. He was elected for life from amongst the Knights by the Chapter of the

Kingdom of Jerusalem, which Addison informs us was composed of all the "Knights of the East and West" who could be in attendance. Three or more of the most esteemed Knights were first proposed; the Grand Prior, who administered affairs temporarily, collected the votes, and he who had received the greatest number was nominated to be the electing Prior. An assistant was then associated with him in the person of another Knight. These two remained all night in the chapel in prayer. In the morning they chose two others; and these four, two more, and so on, until the number of twelve (that of the Apostles) had been selected. The twelve then chose a Chaplain, and these thirteen then elected a Grand Master by a majority of votes. When the election was completed, it was announced to the assembled brethren; and, when all had promised obedience, the Prior, if the person was present, said to him, "In the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, we have chosen, and do choose thee, brother, to be our Master." Then, turning to the brethren, he said, "Beloved sirs and brethren, give thanks unto God; behold here our Master."

The Grand Master was at liberty to appoint a Seneschal to act as vicegerent or deputy. Of the remaining officers the chief was the Mareschal or Marshal, who was second in command, and who was charged with the execution of military arrangements. The Prior of Jerusalem, also called Grand Preceptor of the Temple, was *ex-officio* the Treasurer of the Order; he superintended the chief house, and governed the Temple in the absence of the Master. The Draper had charge of the clothing, and was instructed to distribute the garments "with equal measure and brotherly regard, that the eye of the whisperer or the accuser may not presume to notice anything." The Balcanifer or Standard Bearer, supported by a body of picked Knights, bore the glorious "Beauséant" to the field. The Turcopilar was commander of the Turcopuli, or light skirmishing troops, natives of Syria. Lastly was the Guardian of the Chapel,

or portable church, always with the army in the field. Each province of the Order was governed by a Grand Prior as representative of the Grand Master; and each house was governed by a Prior or Preceptor. The Grand Prior of England, whose seat was at the buildings of the New Temple, just within Temple Bar, in London, was also called *Magister Templi*, or Master of the Temple. The Temple Church was dedicated when Geoffrey was Master of the Temple, in 1185, by Heraclius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem. The various establishments or residences of the Knights were called Preceptories, or Commanderies; they have also been termed Encampments, but this is a more modern term.

The ceremonies of the Order of the Temple were all performed in secret, and none but Templars were allowed to be present at receptions or meetings of the Chapters. This rule seems to have given rise to many plausible but false calumnies against the nature of the rites practised; and many even now brand as immoral and dangerous all such meetings from which they are excluded. With regard to the accusations thus launched against the Order of the Temple, so much of their ceremonies as have been divulged are proved to have contained nothing immoral or profane. And it remains upon the evidence of hundreds of the noblest Knights, that there were no such blemishes in the portions of the rites which are still a sealed mystery from the outer world. The mode of reception into the Order may be briefly described as follows. The reception of a Knight, which was exceedingly solemn, took place in a chapel of the Order, in the presence of an assembled Chapter, *five* Knights, at least, being present to constitute the validity of the rite. A novitiate was prescribed by the canons, though practically it was dispensed with. The form of reception for Chaplains and Serving-brethren was the same, except as regards some particulars of the vow. The Preceptor opened the business with an address to those present, demanding if they knew of any just cause or

impediment why the candidate should not be admitted. If no objection was made, the candidate was conducted into an adjacent chamber, where two or three of the Knights, placing before his view the rigour and austerities of the Order, demanded if he still persisted in entering it. If he persisted, he was asked whether he was willing to remain for life in the Order; whether he was married or betrothed; whether he was a member of any other Order; if he owed more than he could pay; if he was of sound body, without any secret infirmity, and free. If the answers, when reported to the Chapter, were satisfactory, the Preceptor asked if they were willing to receive him, the Knights present assenting in this form: "Let him be brought in, in the name of God." He was now led in by the Knights who had questioned him, and who now instructed him in the mode of asking admission. He advanced, and kneeling before the Preceptor with folded hands, said: "Sir, I am come before God, and before you, and the brethren; and I pray and beseech you, for the sake of God, and our Holy Lady, to receive me into your society and the good works of the Order, as one who all his life long will be the servant and slave of the Order." He was then advised of the hardships he must expect, and was required, at once, to make a total renunciation of his own will and pleasure. If he was constant in his desire, after these warnings, he took the vow of the Order upon the book of the Holy Evangelists, opened at the first chapter of the Gospel of St. John. The principal particulars of the vow included obedience to the Master of the Temple and the Prior, who should be over him; celibacy, poverty as to individual possessions, and observance of the manners and customs of the Order. By it he was bound to devote his strength and power to conquer the Holy Land from the Infidels, and never to wrong a Templar, nor see one wronged, without an endeavour to defend him. This vow being taken in words, its counterpart, reduced to writing, was submitted to him for signature

extent of hostilities, which had proved a gain to the enemies of Christendom. This was however without foundation. It is true that the Superiors of the two Orders differed at times on matters of policy; but, on the other hand, for one hundred and fifty years we find them fighting side by side, and aiding one another in individual instances of prowess; besides there is on record the positive assurance of James de Molay, the martyred Grand Master of the Temple, that there had been no dissensions between them prejudicial to the Christian cause, and that a member of one Order had never been known to raise his hand against a member of the other. Another calumny invented against the Templars was to the effect that their pride and treachery had led to the loss of the second Crusade before Damascus. But it is evident that contemporary history judged them innocent of the treachery of which they have been accused, from the fact that at the close of the second Crusade they received large accessions of numbers, and still larger grants of land and moneys. Of estates the Templars possessed large quantities in Europe and in Palestine; and it was deemed a meritorious atonement for a life of sin to leave all property to one of the religious Orders. In Spain, in later times, they possessed large tracts of country won from the Moors. Alfonso I, of Arragon, at his death left to the Templars his whole kingdom, and though this bequest was annulled by the voice of the people, his successor, Alfonso II, was obliged to pay heavy gifts to the Order as acknowledgment.

In the latter Crusades the warriors were not the lineal descendants of those who had met their death in former struggles with the Saracens, and who might therefore be anxious to wipe out the injury of their death; they were persons, chiefly from the nobility of the land, freshly impelled by military ardour or religious zeal. Frequently service under the Banner of the Cross for a period of years was the penance assigned for heinous crimes to men of high rank. Gallantry is the soul of chivalry; and if the

Knights were each anxious to bring back the banner or the arms of a Mussulman to lay before his lady-love, the ladies on their part were no less eager to promote the success of the Knights abroad. To the Templars, whose vows prohibited them from carolling to any lady-love, or to be even heard to use the profane ditties of the troubadours, no less kindness was shown by dames of high degree. Many a noble maid who regretted that she could not mingle, as Clorinda, or other heroines, in the clash of arms, would give liberally from her time or her purse in aid of their holy object. They would embroider a banner with the mystic stripes of black and white, and lay upon it the eight-pointed red cross to go before them amid the cry "Beauséant" to the victory. So popular in fact had the objects become for which the Templar Order had been instituted, that in the years 1158 and 1175 three Spanish Orders, those of Calatrava, Santiago, and Alcantara, had been organised in imitation of the Knights Templar. The Teutonic Order differed from the others in being composed chiefly of bourgeois—the upper middle class, the rich tradesmen, and merchants; whereas the Knights of all the other orders were exclusively of noble descent.

The Templars did not fail to observe the superiority which their aristocratic constitution afforded them in those feudal times. When each Knight brought the pride of family and title with him, there were little doubt that the whole Order would faithfully reflect the opinions of each member. The simple and austere manners of their founders was speedily forgotten. Ostentation and display took the place of boasted poverty; luxury succeeded penury; arrogance supplanted humility; and pride appeared where submission had been enjoined. It is recorded of Richard Cœur de Lion, that when dying he left his Avarice to the Benedictines, his Luxury to his Prelates, and his Pride to the Templars. Obedience to the uttermost word of the Grand Master was a submission endured by a Knight, only to make him the more arrogant in esteeming the power

finally that they should be permitted to march out unmolested; but, as they were departing, an insult offered by the besiegers caused the Templars suddenly to draw back into their citadel, massacring all who opposed them. The enraged Sultan ordered the siege to be renewed; and, in a few days, the great tower was undermined, and fell upon the bodies of its valiant defenders. The previous night, under cover of the darkness, the Grand Master with only four others made his way out, and escaped to Cyprus. Here Gaudini died soon after, overwhelmed by sorrow and vexation, and was succeeded by the then Grand Preceptor of England, James de Molay.

Nearly two centuries had now elapsed since the foundation of the Order of Templars. Hitherto, except for their alleged frequent quarrels with the Hospitallers, they had been accounted the foremost soldiers of the Cross. Yet so small a period even as forty years had sufficed to witness the subversion of two of the leading articles of the Templar vows. Poverty and Chastity had speedily become terms of mockery and profanation in the mouths of men whose lives were spent between pomp and pride of outward display and private licentiousness of seclusion. Honour and principle had been sacrificed to exalt the outward splendour and aggrandisement of the Order; and it was only their vast material resources, the continual influx of new blood, and the fresh vigour of hot enthusiasm, that maintained for the Order a fair front in spite of the insidious corruptions eating at the heart of their existence. According to the historian, Matthew Paris, the Templars in 1244 were possessors of nine thousand estates in all parts of Europe; and at the time of their dissolution are said to have had an annual revenue equal to the enormous sum of six millions sterling.

The two centuries had worked changes too in the position of the Order abroad as well as at home. The mutual ignorance of Christian and Saracen had worn away, and with it had passed much of that implacable aversion

which nations, mutually ignorant of one another's speech entertain towards one another. Respect for valour, and the growing courtesies of more intimate acquaintance, went far to replace the old traditional antipathy. Brave Knights could no longer entertain the idea that the death of an Infidel could in any measure avenge the cause of the crucified Saviour, or expiate the guilt of past sins. The entire character of the war in the East was changed. The chivalric bearing of the fierce Saladin inspired respect in the bosoms of his enemies; it even produced admiration in the minds of some. Until the capture of Jerusalem at his hands in 1187, the immediate neighbourhood of the city had been, as we have seen, the head quarters of the Templars. The Chapter of the Province of Jerusalem directed most of the affairs of the Order in the Chapters of the remoter provinces. The Grand Prior of Jerusalem possessed certain distinctions above the Priors or Preceptors of the other provinces; he was, ex-officio, the Treasurer of the Order; the Chapter of his province was vested by the constitution with all the executive power of the Order in the intervals between the assembling of a general Chapter. So that with the fall of Jerusalem the Knights were left without a permanent central point of action. The aggressions of the Infidels did not stop here; for four years the Templars were compelled to retire to Antioch; and though they subsequently regained a footing in the fortress of Acre, they were again left without a centre of action at the fall of that last resting place. Well had it been for them had their history ended there.

An Order which has outlived the objects of its growth, and in which honour and sanctity have been thrown aside in grasping after personal ambition and aggrandisement, cannot long withstand the disruption resulting from this subversion of its aims, and it must, sooner or later, collapse from its inherent rottenness. That which long preserved the Order of Knights Templar from this consummation was, doubtless, the vastness of the wealth and material re

sources at its command. Finally they were hated by sovereigns and governments, because of their independence; by the populace, because of their lawlessness; and by the jealous secular Knights, because of their power and their pride. The feeling against them was moreover abetted by the clergy, who deemed the privileges possessed by the Order an encroachment on their own. We may trace, directly or indirectly, almost the whole of these sentiments of enmity to the circumstance that the Knights, in quitting active scenes of warfare for lives of lazy indulgence, had left those duties which were regarded as specially their own. In this respect they were less fortunate than their brethren of the Order of Hospitallers, who, after being driven from the Holy Land, found a fortress to defend in the Island of Rhodes; and later, when this had been won from them, in the Island of Malta. Better far had it been for the Templars had they perished in single-handed combat with all the powers of Mahometanism, than to live at home for the fate that awaited them. To see the respect and reverence once paid them dwindle away—to find power crumble from beneath their enervated strength, must have vexed the nobler spirits among them. Not a few there were whom, had they known the existence of their Order to be imperilled, that knowledge would have roused from their lethargic dreams of security, to fall in its defence with the resolute struggle of conscious valour—to perish, with the consolation of having done what they could to maintain the honour of their brotherhood; but that consolation was denied to the Templars.

Philip the Fair, of France, is the monarch to whose implacable hate the Templars owe their destruction. Of great ambition and self-reliance, his character was marked by almost boundless avarice. He was hated by the poor, on whom he levied heavy taxes; by the rich, from whom he extorted money by sumptuary laws; and by the clergy, who were made both instruments and victims for enriching the royal treasury. Twice had he despoiled of their gains

the rich Jews in Paris, and now he beheld, with covetous eyes, the enormous wealth of the Templars. Philip's chief agent in the plans which he conceived, was Pope Clement V, who had been raised to the chair of St. Peter by his influence, and Clement now proved himself his willing tool. In 1306, one year after his accession, he summoned to Europe the Grand Masters of the Hospitallers and of the Templars, pretending to consult them on a scheme for fusing the two Orders. Only the Grand Master of the Templars obeyed, the Grand Master of the Hospitallers being besieged by the Turks in Rhodes. Leaving the Marshal of the Order in command of the Knights in Cyprus, De Molay, the Grand Master, proceeded slowly to Paris, attended by an enormous retinue of Knights and servants, and carrying much treasure along with him. Shortly afterwards he attended the great council, held by Philip, at Poitiers, and there replied calmly to the Pope that the fusion of the two Orders was impracticable, and objected to the proposals for another Crusade, unaware, while holding this supercilious attitude, of the danger that impended over him. Philip had made up his mind. Two convicts in the royal prisons made, or pretended to make, confessions imputing to the whole of the Knights Templar the most horrible charges. Had these two individuals been men of blameless lives, one might have pardoned Philip for listening to them; but both were men of evil lives, apostates to the faith, and one had been expelled from the Templars for his misdeeds. These individuals accused the Order of heresy, in denying Christ; of treason, in having more than once betrayed the cause of the Christians to the Turks; of idolatry, in worshipping various objects in their secret consistories; of witchcraft, in the magical symbols and devices which they employed; and of the most foul and loathsome deeds practised in their receptions and ceremonies. Sealed letters were at once despatched by the King to the governors of all the towns of France, with orders for them to be opened on a certain day, the 14th of October, 1307. These letters contained directions to seize the persons and arms of the Templars,