

The Knights Templar

ALMOST FROM the beginning of Christianity, pilgrimages to the Holy Land were undertaken by the faithful of many lands. St. Jerome, during his sojourn in Palestine toward the end of the fourth century, writes that Judea was thronged with pilgrims and that praises for the Son of God were proclaimed in many languages. As soon as the West espoused the cause of Christianity, the hearts of its people turned toward the East.

It was in the reign of Constantine that the Holy Land became a spiritual magnet for adherents of the new faith. Constantine celebrated the twenty-first year of his reign by building in Palestine the gloriously beautiful Church of the Ascension. To be present for its dedication by the Holy Initiate, Bishop Eusebius, many thousands of Christians gathered in the Holy Land for worship and praise.

St. Helena, the mother of Constantine, was the daughter of a high priest of the Druids, and she later became one of the foremost women disciples of the Christian School. The year from 326 to 327 the Queen Mother spent in Bible lands. Her piety and esoteric wisdom were evidenced in the rearing of beautiful sanctuaries upon all the prominent sites marked by the life story of Christ Jesus. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher was perhaps the most magnificent and renowned of all the sacred shrines built under the direction of this famous woman. An obscure cavern was transformed into a great marble temple of spacious colonnades and paved with rare and precious stones.

Pilgrims were received everywhere in the Holy Land by resident Christians, who asked nothing in



Engraving, Gustave Doré (1832-1883)

The Discovery of the True Cross

The Crusaders worship the True Cross after it is found in Jerusalem and placed in the Church of the Resurrection.

return for their hospitality but to be remembered in their guests' prayers. Later, wealthy traders built many hospices and places of refuge throughout Palestine, some of which remain to modern times. "The pilgrims while en route," comments a pious author, "both men and women, had no means of protection against evil other than the Cross of Christ, and no guides but angelic bands." In the eyes of the humble people at home, a peculiar sanctity pervaded the atmosphere of one who had resided, however briefly, in the Holy Land, and the very poor who succeeded in making the journey were provided with abundant alms upon returning to their native countries.

This situation was changed when Jerusalem was

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captured by Omar, the Moslem Caliph, in A. D. 637. From that time until the First Crusade in 1099 it was held continuously by nationalities professing the religion of Muhammad.

The purpose of the Crusades was to wrest the Holy Land from the Muhammadans and to again raise aloft the banner of Christ in its rightful place above the Holy City. Mistaken the crusaders may have been in their fanatic zeal, but we must recognize that they were driven by forces having great spiritual objectives in view, which have not even yet been fully achieved. The capture of Palestine was accomplished by the First Crusade, and Godfrey, the sixth Lord of Bouillon, was named Jerusalem's first Christian king. He was the perfect knight, without reproach. He has been termed a "martial spirit in the care of heaven, with that chastity of spirit which felt a stain like a wound." He often expressed regret for the stern necessity which separated him from continued devotion in the cloister.

Godfrey was not chosen carelessly for the kingly honor. He had been judged with the other Crusade leaders, and was chosen for his pre-eminent virtues and perspicacity. The coronation took place at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and there in that sacred place, which afterward became his tomb, he received the title, King of Jerusalem, when he was thirty-nine years of age. He accepted the responsibility but rejected the glory, refusing to wear a crown of gold and jewels where Jesus had worn thorns, saying that the honor of becoming the Defender of the Holy Sepulcher was the height of his aspiration. It is interesting to remember that this "perfect knight" is of the family associated with the Swan Knight legends of Europe, and with certain mysterious and obscure references to the Temple of the Holy Grail.

With the passing of Jerusalem into Christian guardianship, the enthusiasm for pilgrimages flamed anew. Almost every Christian in the Western continent performed some kind of pilgrimage. Parents frequently dedicated their unborn children to accomplish a pilgrimage, and the first duty of an obedient son, upon coming of age, was to fulfill the parental vow. The passageway between the sea ports and Jerusalem; however, was

now fraught with double peril. Bands of fugitive Muslims wrought indiscriminate pillage upon the life and property of travellers, who were exposed to hostility, cruel abuses, and even death.

It was this situation which called the Order of the Temple into being. To guard the aged upon these hazardous passes and to protect saintly women on their journeys to the Holy City, the noble Hugh de Payen and nine equally brave and distinguished Knights formed a holy Brotherhood for the protection of pilgrims. In the year 1113 these nine Knights took their vows of ordination in the Holy Church of the Resurrection, embracing a life of perpetual chastity, obedience, and poverty, and renouncing the world and its pleasures. They called themselves the "Poor Fellow-soldiers of Jesus Christ," and selected as their patroness "Mary, the Sweet Mother of God."

The holy knight, Hugh de Payen, became the first Grand Master, and continued that office for twenty-one years. Addison, in his *Knights Templar History*, adds that after seeing the Order rise to the highest position among the warrior bands of Palestine under his care and the patronage of St. Bernard, this gallant soldier of the cross died in 1139. Gibbons comments: "This Order became the firmest bulwark of Christianity in the East and mainly contributed to preserve Europe from Turkish desolation and probably Turkish conquest."

The place of habitation given to these valiant Knights was within the sacred enclosure of the Temple on Mt. Moriah, and from this arose their appellation, The Knighthood of the Temple of Solomon, or the Knights Templar.

St. Bernard writes of the Order thus: "These soldiers of Christ live together in an agreeable but frugal manner. They dwell together in one house without separate property of any kind, and are careful to preserve the Unity of spirit in the bond of peace. In the whole multitude there is but one heart and one soul, as each one in no respect followeth after his own will or desire, but is diligent to the will of the Master."

The exemplary life of the Templars aroused great enthusiasm for them throughout Europe. Hugh de Payens, the Grand Master, formed Lodges in many of Europe's capitals. Gifts of

houses and lands poured in upon them, and so important did these Lodges become that England's King John was residing in the Temple Church at the time of the signing of the Magna Charta.

The Temple in Paris was said to be of such immense proportions that a large army could be stationed within its precincts. These magnificent Temples in various cities became the principal entertainment centers for Kings, princes, nobles and prelates. In 1247 the Grand Master William de Beaujeu attended a General Council in Lyons called together by the Pope. A thousand Bishops and Ambassadors from the courts of Europe attended the Council, but the Grand Master of the Templars was given precedence over all the distinguished and noble guests present.

The Templars extended their magnificence in living even to the environs of Palestine. With the loss of Jerusalem to the Christians in 1187 A.D., Acre became the metropolis of the Latin Christians and in this luxurious city, the most spacious and palatial building was the house of the Knights Templar.

The vast holdings of the Order at the time of the dedication of the London Temple are described as follows: "Their circumstances are in so flourishing a state that in their Temple on Mt. Moriah are three hundred Knights of the White Habit, besides innumerable serving brothers. Their possessions both in Palestine and beyond the sea are so vast that there is not a province throughout Christendom but that contributes to their support. Their wealth is said to equal that of sovereign princes."

At the time of their immolation, the Templars were said to be in possession of nine thousand manor houses, besides large revenues from bequests and donations. The annual income of the Order was estimated at about thirty million dollars.

Extreme worldly magnificence and elevation produces the seed of its own dissolution. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" applies with especial force to organizations dedicated to things of the spirit. The Knights Templar can never be accused of cowardice. Their early fame as valiant and courageous defenders of Christendom's shrines remains untarnished. However, these later Knights, the possessors of lands, revenues and



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Engraving, Gustave Doré (1832-1883)

The Crusaders witness an extraordinary event on their quest.

estates, lacked the pious simplicity and sanctity of the holy men who, with Hugh of the Temple, took the vow of the ordination which was summarized briefly as "Two Knights for every one horse."

The Order of the Temple, through its enormous wealth and sumptuous living, gradually but inevitably lost the former reverence given to it both by Church and laity, and became instead the object of envy and hatred. There were leaders both in the Church and upon thrones who looked with envious and avaricious eyes upon the Templar's vast holdings, and schemed to bring about its downfall. After trials that were a travesty of justice, and tortures cruel and diabolical (for this was the real beginning of the Inquisition), this high Order was demolished, its immense wealth confiscated, and its brave leader, Jacques de Molay, together with many of his loyal followers, burned at the stake in the month of March, 1312. The lives of many thousands of the Templar Knights were concurrently sacrificed in the atrocities of the dungeon, the rack, and the sword. Thus ends one of the darkest of civilization's many shadowed pages.

The charge brought against the Templars was that they were heretics against the Christian faith.

Here again was evidenced the age-long conflict between orthodoxy (the outer) and esotericism (the inner). There is no doubt that in its beginnings the Templar Order was founded upon the secret Rites of the Ancient Wisdom and hereby have a common origin with Masonry. Their most important meetings were held at midnight and at sunrise. These observances were also a part of Essenian communities still resident in Palestine in that day.

The Abacus, or mystic staff, which was carried by the Grand Master and was symbolic of his power, was a design of deep mystic import. Prince Edward I of England was struck down by the poisoned dagger of an assassin while in Palestine, and although near death, he was healed by the magical skill of the Grand Master of the Order.

That the Templars Order was also a part of esoteric Christianity is shown in the beautiful statuary of Mary which frequently adorned their Temples. In a church in Sicily there is a famous statue of Mary and the Holy Babe executed in 833 A.D. and brought by the Knights Templars from the East to be placed in the Temple Church in Rome. In Bologna there is a large Temple House with its church of St. Mary. In France there remains a Temple house with its chapel dedicated to the Virgin.

The girdles worn by the Brothers were termed Girdles of Nazareth because they had been pressed against the column of the Virgin at that place, and were always worn in remembrance of the blessed Mary. (Esoteric Christianity has always honored Mary, not alone as the Mother of Jesus, but because of her high initiatory work. She is the highest Initiate who ever came to Earth wearing a feminine body.)

The principal initiatory Rites of the Templars appear to have been based upon the meaning of the Cosmic Cross and its significance in the life of man. This was evidently the "Cross which they adored" at the sacred seasons of the equinoxes and the solstices. ("The World Soul Crucified" is also the essential Mystery upon which the Rosicrucian School is founded.) This "misuse" of the cross, according to the orthodox viewpoint, was one of the principal charges in the Templars trial for heresy.

The famous white and black banner of the

Templars also carries an astronomical significance, according to Ward in his *Freemasonry and the Ancient God*. "It represents light and darkness, day and night, and suggests the range of the Solar System, which, in accordance with medieval belief, was bounded on the outermost limit by the 'sphere' of Saturn, to whom was assigned the color black. Its inner limit was the 'sphere' of the Moon, whose color was white. Thus it signifies the linking of Heaven and Earth, the unifying of man with the Universal."

The other banner, a red cross on a white field, typified the cosmic significance of the Cross previously alluded to—the material transmuted into the spiritual.

The habit of the Templars was white, "the habit of Christ." Upon the left side of the long, white cape, and worn just over the heart, was the crimson cross, symbolic of the Templar's vow to spend the last drop of his blood for the cause of Christ.

With the final overthrow of Christian power in Palestine, the Grand Master Gaudini escaped from Acre, taking with him the sacred treasures of the Order, and established the "Master's House" on the island of Cyprus. Upon his death, the succession of Grand Master came to Jacques de Molay. When he was summoned to France to meet the heresy charges of Pope Clement V, he took with him the Sacred Treasure and deposited it in the Order of Paris.

At the time of his martyrdom, his nephew and other Brothers escaped with the treasure, carrying it into Scotland where it was evidently worked with the Hidden Rite upon which the deeply esoteric Kilwinning Lodge was founded.

Many of the Templars in England also escaped persecution by fleeing into Scotland where the unsettled condition of the country prevented their discovery or capture. At the time of the suppression of the Order, Robert Bruce was endeavoring to incite Scotland against England, and it was these wars that preserved the Templars in Scotland. On St. John's Day, or the Summer Solstice, of 1314, Bruce routed Edward II and upon all Masons who had assisted him he conferred the rank of Knights of the Rosy Cross.

The Lodge of Stirling had a chapter of Templars

whose secret work was given in an old Abbey nearby. They worked the various high degrees, including that of the Rose Croix, whose secrets, as stated previously, were taken from the very innermost Mysteries of the Rosicrucians.

From Masonic sources in Scotland comes this significant initiatory mantram:

*For we are Brethren of the Rosie Cross,
We have the Master's Word and second sight.*

There is little doubt but that the Mother Kilwinning Lodge in Scotland became the depository for the esoteric Christian teachings brought into Europe from the Holy Land, and so became also the center of English Rosicrucianism, which holds the key to the hidden Mysteries in the life of Christ Jesus as well as of the mystic masonic orders which are also based on these Mysteries.

These beautiful truths have, however, now become legendary, for under the influence of deepening materialism, the Grand Lodge of Scotland in 1800 decreed that any Lodge working the higher Degrees must forfeit its charter. The ban of the Secret Society Act was passed that year, and evidently fearful of its results, this famous Lodge preferred to renounce the higher Degrees rather than their Craft.

Nonetheless, Mystic Masonry still lives and will continue to live. Neither decrees, nor persecution, nor imprisonment, nor torture, nor death at the stake have annihilated the true and essential Order. Regardless of all man-made barriers, there are brave souls ready and willing to make the hard journey toward the East in quest of Light.

The fallen Order of the Temple, revived under different names, infiltrated many organizations. The surviving Knights became alchemists, Hermetic Philosophers, Rosicrucians, and finally, Masons. The Crusaders while in the East had become familiar with the doctrine of the Gnostics and Kabbalists. Hugh de Payens was learned in the esoteric work of Christianity as practiced in the Holy Land. Chronicles aver that in 1118 he was clothed with the patriarchal power in the legitimate Order of Succession of Saint John.

The Church meantime had lost the keys of revelation. That the Templars were endeavoring to

Immediately after the deliverance of Jerusalem, the Crusaders, considering their vow fulfilled, returned in a body to their homes. The defense of this precarious conquest, surrounded as it was by Mohammedan neighbors, remained. In 1118, during the reign of Baldwin II, Hugues de Payens, a knight of Champagne, and eight companions bound themselves by a perpetual vow, taken in the presence of the Patriarch of Jerusalem, to defend the Christian kingdom. Baldwin accepted their services and assigned them a portion of his palace, adjoining the temple of the city; hence their title "pauvres chevaliers du temple" (Poor Knights of the Temple). Poor indeed they were, being reduced to living on alms, and, so long as they were only nine, they were hardly prepared to render important services, unless it were as escorts to the pilgrims on their way from Jerusalem to the banks of the Jordan, then frequented as a place of devotion.

The Templars had as yet neither distinctive habit nor rule. Hugues de Payens journeyed to the West to seek the approbation of the Church and to obtain recruits. At the Council of Troyes (1128), at which he assisted and at which St. Bernard was the leading spirit, the Knights Templars adopted the Rule of St. Benedict, as recently reformed by the Cistercians. They accepted not only the three perpetual vows, besides the crusader's vow, but also the austere rules concerning the chapel, the refectory, and the dormitory. They also adopted the white habit of the Cistercians, adding to it a red cross. —*The Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol xiv*

restore the Mysteries was the chief cause of the numerous charges of monstrous crimes and blasphemies which were brought against them. At the same time, it must be apparent to any esoteric student that the great ideal of both Templar Masonry and Esoteric Christianity is one and the same, centering in that New Temple of Christ, which is to rise in the Holy City upon the sacred area of Mt. Moriah. Once again bands of pilgrims will assemble from all parts of the world in the holy environ, and at the high festivals of the Four Sacred Seasons will again meet Christ face to face. □

—Corinne Heline