

THE ABOLITION OF THE KNIGHTS TEMPLARS.

I wish, first of all, to direct your attention to the relationship between Philip le Bel King of France and Pope Clement V, and their respective characters. On the death of Pope Benedict XI in 1304 Philip the Fair succeeded by intrigue in raising the Archbishop of Bordeaux, described as a creature of his own, to the pontifical chair. The new Pope removed the Holy See from Rome to France, and was consecrated there in 1305 by the name of Clement V. Of the ten new Cardinals then created, NINE were Frenchmen, and in all his acts he manifested himself the obedient slave of the French monarch. This should be borne in mind throughout the following events.

It is well known that Philip was a needy and avaricious monarch. The character of Clement V. too was painted by the Romish historians in the darkest colours. They represent him as wedded to pleasure, eaten up with ambition, and greedy for money. They also accuse him of indulging in a criminal intrigue with the beautiful Countess of Perigord, and of trafficking in holy things.

On June 6th. 1306, this new French pontiff addressed letters from Bordeaux to the Grand Masters of the Temple and Hospital, expressing a wish to consult them with regard to the necessary measures to be taken for the recovery of the Holy Land. "We order you" he wrote "to come hither without delay, with as much secrecy as possible, and with a very little retinue, since you will find on this side of the sea a sufficient number of your Knights to attend upon you". The Grand Master of the Hospital declined to obey this summons, but the Grand Master of the Temple, ^{James de Molay} accepted it, and unhesitatingly placed himself in the power of the Pope and the King of France. It seems to me very ironical that his acceptance led to the abolition of the Knights Templars while the Hospitallers not only remained in existence but ultimately acquired some of their property.

At the commencement of the year 1307 the Grand Master of the

Temple landed in France attended by sixty of his Knights, and deposited the treasure of the Order which he had brought from Cyprus in the Temple at Paris. He was received with distinction by the King, and then went to Poitiers to have an interview with the Pope, who retained him with conferences relative to a pretended expedition for the recovery of the Holy Land. Among other things the Pope proposed a union between the Templars and Hospitallers, to which the Grand Master objected. While these talks continued the French King had agents circulating dark and odious reports concerning the Templars. It was said that they would never have lost the Holy Land if they had been good Christians.

On the 14th. of September 1307 Philip le Bel despatched secret orders to all the baillis of the different provinces in France, couched in the following extravagant and absurd terms:-

"Philip, by the grace of God king of the French, to his beloved and faithful knights.....etc., etc., A deplorable and most lamentable matter, full of bitterness and grief, a monstrous business, a thing that one cannot think of without affright, cannot hear without horror, transgressions unheard of, enormities and atrocities contrary to every sentiment of humanity, etc., etc., have reached our ears." After a long and extraordinary tirade of this kind, Philip accuses the Templars of insulting Jesus Christ, and making him suffer more in those days than he suffered formerly upon the cross, of renouncing the Christian religion, of sacrificing to idols, and of abandoning themselves to impure practices and unnatural crimes. He characterises them as ravishing wolves in sheep's clothing, a perfidious ungrateful, idolatrous society, whose words and deeds were enough to pollute the earth and infect the air.

This very long letter is difficult to summarise. It continues "We being charged with the maintenance of the faith; and having conferred with the pope, the prelates, and the barons of the kingdom,

at the instance of the inquisitor, etc., etc., have decreed that the members of the order who are our subjects shall be arrested and detained to be judged by the church, and that all their real and personal property shall be seized into our hands, and be faithfully preserved etc., etc. To these orders are attached instructions requiring the baillis and seneschals accurately to inform themselves with great secrecy, and without exciting suspicion, of the number of houses of the Temple within their jurisdictions. They are then to provide an armed force sufficient to overcome all resistance, and on the 13th of October are to surprise the Templars in their preceptories, and make them prisoners. Then they were to be examined and tortured if necessary. Philip said "Before proceeding with an enquiry you are to inform them that the Pope and ourselves have been convinced, by irreproachable testimony, of the errors and abominations which accompany their vows and profession; you are to promise them pardon and favour if they confess the truth, but if not, you are to acquaint them that they will be condemned to death."

Next Philip wrote to the principal sovereigns of Europe urging them to follow his example. An agent named Bernard Paletin was sent with the letter to young Edward the Second, who had just ascended the throne of England, but he refused to believe the charges. He informed King Philip that by the advice of his council he had ordered the seneschal of Agen, from whose lips the rumours were said to have been proceeded, to be summoned to his presence.

On the night of October 13th, all the Templars in the French dominions were simultaneously arrested, as planned, and Monks were appointed to preach against them and spread the extravagant charges, which due to the superstition and credulity of the age, were believed. As weeks passed thirty-six Templars perished, still maintaining with unshaken constancy to the very last, the entire innocence of their order. Many of them lost the use of their feet from the application

of the torture of fire, which was inflicted in the following manner:- their legs were fastened in an ironframe, and the soles of their feet were greased with fat or butter; they were then placed before the fire, and a screen was drawn backwards and forwards, so as to moderate and regulate the heat. Such was the agony produced by this roasting operation, that the victims often went raving mad. Brother Bernarde de Vado, on subsequently revoking a confession of guilt, wrung from him by this description of torment, said to the commissary of police, before whom he was brought to be examined, "They held me so long before a fierce fire that the flesh was burnt off my heels, two pieces of bone came away, which I present to you." Many of the torments were revolting and indecent, and in addition it appears that forged letters from the Grand Master were shown to the prisoners, exhorting them to confess themselves guilty.

On December 4th 1307 Edward the Second wrote long letters to the Kings of Portugal, Castile, Aragon and Sicily defending the Templars and even asking them to turn a deaf ear to the slander of ill-natured men, who are animated, as we believe, not with a zeal of rectitude, but with a spirit of cupidity and envy." A few days later he wrote to the Pope expressing his disbelief of the horrible and detestable rumours spread abroad concerning the Templars. All these letters were sent after he had examined the seneschal of Agen concerning the truth of the charges preferred against the Templars.. He did not know that on November 22nd the Pope had issued a bull to him setting out at great length the case against them, and directing the King to hold them in the name of the Pope. Also to commit all their real and personal property to the hands of certain trustworthy persons, to be faithfully preserved until the holy pontiff shall give further directions concerning it. The young king received this bull immediately after he had despatched his letter to the Pope, and he was now either convinced of the guilt of the Templars or he hoped to turn the proceedings against them to a profitable account. Anyway

he carried out this order and covered England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. On the 8th of January 1308, the Templars were suddenly arrested and their property seized into the King's hands.

In the time at my disposal it is difficult to select points from the long and complicated events that followed. On August 12th the Pope addressed a bull to the English Bishops expressing his unwillingness to believe the rumours being spread about the Templars. He continued "But afterwards, our most dear son in Christ, Philip, the illustrious king of the French, to whom the same crimes had been made known, not from motives of avarice, (since he does not deign to apply or to appropriate to himself any portion of the estates of the Templars, nay, has washed his hands of them) but inflamed with zeal for the orthodox faith etc., etc." I think that this is a good example of the team work between the Pope and the King.

King Edward in the mean time had begun to make free with their property, and on October 4th the Pope wrote to him on this matter. The King sent this short and pithy reply: "As to the goods of the Templars, we have done nothing with them up to the present time, nor do we intend to do with them aught but what we have a right to do, and what we know will be acceptable to the Most High". All the same a general scramble appears to have taken place for the possession of the goods and chattles of the imprisoned Templars, for to check the robberies the King ordered an inquiry to be made into the value of the property that had been carried off, and the names of those who had obtained it.

By this time the total number of Templars in custody was two hundred and twenty-nine. Many however were still at large, having successfully evaded capture by obliterating all marks of their previous profession, and some had escaped in disguise to the wild and mountainous parts of Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. Among the prisoners confined in the Tower were veteran warriors who had fought to the

last in defence of Palestine, had escaped the slaughter at Acre, and had accompanied the Grand Master from Cyprus to France, and then to England, only to be rewarded for their services with a dungeon. Many of the Brethren examined had been from twenty to forty-three years in the Order, yet in 1309 a papal bull containing eighty-seven articles of accusation was sent out. In November that year proceedings against the Order commenced in Scotland, and early in 1310 in Ireland.

In 1309, however, the proceedings against the Order in France had taken a most extraordinary turn. The extreme violence and cruelty practised by the royal officers began to excite some sympathy for the imprisoned Knights. This in spite of the secrecy surrounding the proceedings. Even Clement V. ventured to express dissatisfaction at the conduct of King Philip, and suspended the powers of the Grand Inquisitor, William de Paris, and inhibited the Bishops of France from taking further cognizance of the affairs of the Templars. At the same time he wrote to the King, telling him that he had sent the Cardinals Berenger de Fredoli and Stephen de Lusy to his majesty to receive the persons and effects of the members of the Order, and that he expected the King ~~to~~ immediately to put them into their hands, or those of the bishop his nuncio.

As might be expected Philip wrote a very warm reply to this letter. He upbraided the Pope for his lukewarmness in the cause of religion, and declared that he was violating the oath he took at his coronation. "It would be a crying sin" wrote the royal hypocrite, "to throw such contempt upon those whom God hath sent; for our Lord saith, 'he that despiseth you despiseth me'. Who holy father, is the sacrilegious wretch that dares advise you to despise these prelates, or rather Jesus Christ who has sent them?" Needless to say Clement did not venture to further impede such a zealous servant of the Lord. He cancelled the bulls that he had prepared, and Philip then made

a show of placing the captive Templars and their property at the disposal of the officers of the Pope..

On May 12th 1310 fifty-four Templars were handed over to the secular arm, and were led out to execution by the King's officers. They were fastened to stakes driven into the ground, surrounded by faggots and charcoal. They saw the torches lighted, and they were then once more offered pardon and favour if they would confess the truth. They persisted in the maintenance of the innocence of the Order, and were burnt to death in a most cruel manner before slow fires, their voices being heard to the last through the wreathing smoke, invoking the blessing and the mercy of the Lord, and calling on the Holy Virgin and all the saints. All historians speak with admiration of the heroism and intrepidity with which they met their fate.

Here let us return to the history of the Order in England. All the Templars in custody in this country had been examined separately and apart, but in substance had given the same account of their reception into the Order, and of the oaths that they had taken. At first King Edward forbade the infliction of torture upon the Templars in his dominions, but the resolution of this weak monarch was speedily overcome by the all-powerful influence of the Roman pontiff, who wrote upbraiding him for not submitting them to the rack. Although he then ordered them to be tortured he provided that the examination should be conducted without the PERPETUAL MUTILATION OR DISABLING OF ANY LIMB, AND WITHOUT A VIOLENT EFFUSION OF BLOOD.

A fortnight later the King sent fresh instructions to the Constable of the Tower apparently leaving things to the inquisitors, but the gaolers proved more merciful, and showed the greatest reluctance to act on the orders of the King. So things dragged on and on. By the end of March 1311 the Templars had been in prison in England for well over three years. Inquisitors had been sent to England by the Pope, and

by July the Templars were found to be guilty of heresy. A sort of compromise however was made with most of the Templars in custody in London. They were required publicly to repeat a form of confession and abjuration drawn up by the Bishops of London and Chichester, and were then solemnly absolved and reconciled to the church. I would like to quote part of a sentence from these terms which I consider to be very significant "and since you have confessed that you cannot entirely purge yourselves from the heresies set forth under the apostolic bull," This absolution then spread to Templars in other parts of the country. It is recorded that some of the Knights absolved "were too old and so infirm that they were unable to stand." All these penitent Templars were released from prison, and directed to do penance in different monasteries. Thus terminated the proceedings against the Order of the Temple in England.

Similar measures had, in the mean time, taken place in all parts of Christendom. It is interesting to record that in both Portugal and Germany the Templars were declared to be innocent, and that in no place situated beyond the sphere of influence of the King of France and Pope Clement V, was a single Templar condemned to death. On October 16th 1311 the General Council of the Church was convened by the Pope to pronounce the abolition of the Order. Although the Order was now broken up, nine fugitive Templars had the courage to present themselves before the Council and demand to be heard in defence of their Order. They claimed that they represented 1,500 to 2,000 Templars who were wandering about as fugitives and outlaws in the neighbourhood of Lyons. A letter from the Pope to King Philip states this fact, and also informs us how the holy pontiff acted. Clement caused them to be thrown into prison, where they languished and died. The assembled Fathers, to their honour, expressed their disapprobation of this fragrant act of injustice, and most of the Council agreed that the members of such an illustrious Order ought to be heard in their own defence. This did not suit the Pope or King Philip, and it

resulted in the assembly being abruptly dismissed.

At the commencement of 1312 the Pope summoned a private consistory, and abolished the Order by an apostolical ordinance, perpetually prohibiting every one from thenceforth entering into it, or accepting or wearing the habit thereof, or representing themselves to be Templars, on pain of excommunication. About the middle of that year, Brother William de la More, Master of the Temple in England, died it is said, of a broken heart in his solitary dungeon in the Tower, persisting with his last breath in the maintenance of the innocence of his order. King Edward, in pity for his misfortunes, directed the constable of the Tower to hand over his goods and chattels, valued at the sum of £4-19s-11d to his executors, to be employed in the liquidation of his debts, and he commanded Geoffrey de la Lee, guardian of the lands of the Templars, to pay the arrears of his prison pay (2s. per diem) to the executor, Roger Hunsington.

James de Molay

On March 18th 1313 the last Grand Master of the Temple together with three other eminent knights, all of whom had been in prison in France for five and a half years, was burned to death in a slow and lingering manner by order of Philip le Bel, who had not consulted the Pope or the ecclesiastical council. Most of you know of the horrible fates that befell all the persecutors of our Order. Thirteen months after his execution the Pope died of dysentery. His body was placed at night in a church at Carpentras which caught fire, and his remains were almost entirely consumed. His relations quarrelled over the immense treasures he left, and a vast sum of money, which had been deposited for safety in a church at Lucca, was stolen by a daring band of German and Italian freebooters. Before the end of the year, Philip died of a lingering disease that baffled all the art of his medical attendants, and the condemned criminal, upon the strength of whose information the Templars were originally arrested, was hanged for fresh crimes. The misfortunes of Edward the Second, and his horrible death

in Berkley Castle may also be mentioned.

To save appearances, the Pope had published a bull transferring the property, lately belonging to the Templars, to the Order of the Hospital of Saint John, which had acquired additional renown and popularity in Europe by the conquest from the infidels of the island of Rhodes. This bull however remained for a considerable period nearly a dead letter, and the Hospitallers never obtained a twentieth part of the ancient possessions of the Templars. "The chief cause of the ruin of the Templars," remarks Fuller, "was their extraordinary wealth..... We may believe that King Philip would never have taken away their lives if he might have taken their lands without putting them to death, but the mischief was, he could not get the honey unless he burnt the bees."

During the five years of the proceedings against the Order, King Philip, the Pope, and the European Sovereigns appear to have disposed of all the Templars ornaments, jewels, and treasures of their churches and chapels, but they remained in the actual receipt of the vast rents and revenues of the fraternity. After the promulgation of the bull, assigning the property of the Templars to the Hospitallers, King Philip put forward a claim upon the land to the extent of two hundred thousand pounds for the expenses of the prosecution, and Louis Hutin, his son, required a further sum of sixty thousand pounds from the Hospitallers, before he would consent to surrender the estates into their hands.

In England the "Guardians of the lands of the Templars" were directed to pay various pensions to the old servants and retainers of the Templars dwelling in the different preceptories, and also the expenses of the prosecution against the Order. In 1312 the King however began to dispose of the property as if it was wholly vested in the crown, and made munificent donations to his favourites and friends. On May 16th the Pope addressed bulls to the King, and all the Earls and

Barons of the kingdom commanding them forthwith to place the property late belonging to the Templars in the hands of the members of the Hospital of Saint John. King Edward and his nobles resisted this decree, and the King continued to distribute the lands and rents amongst his friends and favourites. On November 21st 1313 he finally yielded to the exhortations and menaces of the Pope, and granted the property to the Hospitallers.

At this period, however, many of the heirs of the donors, whose titles had been recognised by law, were in possession of the lands, and the judges held that the King had no power of his own sole authority to transfer them to the Order of the Hospital. The struggle continued between the heirs, the Hospitallers, Pope John and King Edward the Third until in 1334 an Act of Parliament confirmed the statute in favour of the Hospitallers.

Whilst all this was going on, the surviving brethren of the dissolved Order continued to be treated with the utmost inhumanity and neglect. The ecclesiastical Council had assigned to each of them a pension of Fourpence a day for subsistence, but this small pittance was not paid, and they were consequently in great danger of dying of hunger. The King and the Archbishop of Canterbury both took pity on them, and tried to prevent them from having to beg in the streets. The Archbishop of York caused many of them to be supported in the different monasteries of his diocese.

Many Templars after the dissolution of their Order, assumed a secular habit and blended themselves with the laity. They mixed in the pleasures of the world, and even presumed to contract matrimony, proceedings which drew upon them the severe indignation of the Roman pontiff. In a bull addressed to the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Pope stigmatises these marriages as unlawful concubinages. He claimed that the late Templars remained bound, notwithstanding the dissolution of their Order, by their vows of perpetual chastity. He ordered them to be

separated from the women whom they had married, and to be placed in different monasteries.

Most of the Templars had adopted the oriental fashion of long beards, and during the proscription of the fraternity, when the fugitives who had thrown off their habits were hunted like wild beasts, it appears to have been dangerous for laymen to possess beards of more than a few weeks' growth. In fact papers and certificates were granted to men with long beards, to prevent them from being molested by the officers of justice as suspected Templars.

I have selected and arranged all the foregoing material from the second edition of "The Knights Templars" by C.G. Addison of the Inner Temple, published in 1842. In a long introduction the author states that he has "diligently sought after original sources of information, not suppressing anything I believe to be true." The second edition was enlarged by 250 pages and contains quotations in Latin, French and Norman French from the original sources in support of his statements. I found not only the items I have mentioned but many others of great interest, and I hope that you have found my paper interesting.