The epic of the Templars – a chronicle

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In the Year of Grace 1095

In the year of our Lord eleven hundred and five-and-ninety, in the days when Christendom was inflamed for the Crusade, nine knights set their faces toward the Holy Land. And for nine years entire, no man beheld them nor heard tidings thereof. And many spoke in whispers that, in the silence of those days, they had found a wondrous treasure: the riches of the Temple, sacred relics, yea, perchance the Ark of the Covenant itself, or the holy Chalice of the Last Supper.

Of the Call of Urban II

In that selfsame year, did Pope Urban II summon the faithful to take up the Cross. Great was the promise of absolution granted unto prisoners who would join the host of the Lord. For two centuries did these Crusades make the Holy Land to run with blood. Monks departed from their cloisters to don the mailed hauberk; and nine knights, contrariwise, chose instead to become monks, that they might defend the pilgrims from brigands and from the Unbelievers, whom they hardly distinguished one from another.

Of the Foundation of the Order

The first Master was Hugues de Payens. After the taking of Jerusalem in the year eleven hundred and nine-and-ninety, pilgrims flocked thither in multitude. King Baldwin II, desiring their safeguard, sent six knights unto France, bearing letters unto the Pope. And Bernard of Clairvaux—whose relics rest unto this day within the cathedral of Troyes—wrote for them a strict rule: threescore and twelve articles of faith and discipline.

In the year eleven hundred and nine-and-twenty, at the Council of Troyes, the Order was consecrated before the great ones of the Church, beneath the motto: *Regula Pauperum Commilitonum Christi et Templi Salomonis*. And King Baldwin gave them dwelling upon the Temple Mount, where now standeth the mosque al-Aqsa. Thus were they called “Knights of the Temple,” or Templars. Jerusalem became their chief seat until the year eleven hundred and seven-and-eighty.

In that year, the Templars numbered ten thousand brethren, of whom a thousand were knights.

Of the Life of the Brethren of the Temple

These men of warfare and of prayer renounced the world. They vowed obedience, chastity, and poverty; they lived of alms; yea, oft did two brethren share but a single steed. They wore a white

mantle adorned with the red cross, and marched beneath a banner half white, half black: white for Christ, black for His enemies.

Their rites of initiation lay hidden beneath mystery. Their hierarchy, rich and well-ordered, ranged from Seneschal unto Marshal, from the Commander of the East unto the Draper, from knights unto sergeants, from chaplains unto craftsmen brethren. Endued with immunities and endowed with many gifts, they possessed at their height nine thousand commanderies in Europe, whereof three thousand in France.

Monks, Soldiers, and Changers of Money

Yet the Templars kept not only the sword. They devised also a subtle craft: pilgrims laid up their goods in Europe and received in exchange a coded writ, payable in the East. Thus arose their bank, steadfast and prosperous, freed from taxes by papal bull.

But this power stirred envy and covetousness. In the year eleven hundred and six-and-forty, King Louis VII of France entrusted the keeping of his royal treasure unto the Templars; and King Henry II of England likewise made use of their guardianship. When Louis IX lacked silver during the Seventh Crusade, the Templars took a mighty part in furnishing his armies and hired ships to bear the crusaders unto Egypt. In that same Crusade Louis IX was taken captive, but the Templars intervened and paid the last portion of his ransom, which they raised in a single day from the silver stored in their ships.

In the year eleven hundred and seven-and-eighty, in the battle of Hattin, fourscore brethren fell beneath the sword. Jerusalem was lost, and the seat of the Order fled unto Acre. And in the year twelve hundred and one-and-ninety, when the Holy Land was lost utterly unto the Crusaders, Commander Thibaud Gaudin bore the seat unto Limassol, on the isle of Cyprus, purchased aforetime by King Richard the Lionheart. There the Temple established its headquarters, whose trace vanished upon the dissolution of the Order in the year thirteen hundred and twelve.

Of the Fortune and the Wrath of Kings

And when the brethren of the Temple had departed from the Holy Land, fifteen thousand of them returned unto Europe, bearing many treasures: a great multitude of gold florins, riches gathered through centuries, and even captives from the East. Unto them were ascribed books of laws, mystical secrets, esoteric knowledge, and archives whose depth no man could fathom.

Henry III of England, to sustain his wars, pawned even the jewels of his crown into their hands. And Philip IV, called the Fair, whose coffers were laden with debts unto the Order, desired to force its union with the Hospitallers. But Jacques de Molay, Master of the Temple, stood against it steadfastly. Then the king, his heart darkened with resentment, swore the downfall of the Poor Knights and contrived, from the Abbey of Maubuisson, a grievous plot against them.

Friday the Thirteenth Day of October

In the year of grace thirteen hundred and seven, on the thirteenth day of October, which was a Friday, the king's sergeants beset the houses of the Temple. Nine hundred brethren were taken and brought unto Chinon. There they were accused of impious crimes: idolatry, sorcery, sodomy, the worship of the demon Baphomet, the profaning of the Cross, and dark alliances.

Pope Clement V, who held court at Avignon, raised not his hand to defend them. Guillaume Imbert, confessor unto the king, commanded cruel torments against them: limbs bound behind the back, victims hung upon cords, the soles of their feet burned with fire. Thus did an hundred and five brethren out of an hundred and eight-and-thirty confess, through anguish, deeds which they had not wrought. Bernard Gui, inquisitor of Toulouse, wrote that they must be converted or delivered unto the flame. And many perished—five dozens in number.

The End of the Master

In the year thirteen hundred and fourteen, on the eighteenth day of March, the Grand Master Jacques de Molay was brought before Notre-Dame of Paris and given unto the fire. His ashes were cast into the Seine. But ere his soul departed from its mortal vessel, he cursed both king and pope, summoning them to appear shortly before the judgment seat of God. And the chronicles record that the prophecy was fulfilled within the year.

Two years earlier, at the Council of Vienne, the pontiff had pronounced the dissolution of the Order.

Of the Great Mystery of the Treasure

Yet amid all chronicles, one riddle remaineth most steadfast: the treasure of the Temple. For though Philip the Fair seized lands, commanderies, and strongholds, neither gold nor relics were ever found. Men tell that a ship set sail secretly from La Rochelle, bearing riches and secrets. Six hundred and twenty brethren only were captured; the others, it seemeth, fled unto Aragon or unto Switzerland, where some perceive the beginnings of modern banks.

Thus perished—yet not without glory—the Order of the Poor Knights of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon: consumed by fire, yet not by oblivion.

Of the Scottish Exile and the Trace of the Treasure

In the year thirteen hundred and six, many accounts relate that fugitive Templars found refuge in Scotland. King Robert the Bruce, being then under excommunication, received them kindly, seeing in them servants of Providence and valiant companions in arms.

And many affirm that, at the battle of Bannockburn in thirteen hundred and fourteen, the valor of these knights aided the Scots in winning victory, securing unto the realm its independence and restoring honor to the exiles from France.

After these events, the brethren of the Temple are said to have dwelt at Roslyn Castle near Edinburgh, entrusted unto them by the noble house of St-Clair. Great was the astonishment when strange signs were found carved in stone: marks of the Templars, symbols of Freemasons, and ancient motifs from forgotten ages. A certain column especially recalled, by its adornment, the ancient seat of the Temple at Paris and the noble Temple Mount of Jerusalem.

Many excavations were undertaken in that place to discover some relic or treasure; but in the year eighteen hundred and ninety, the authorities put an end to those searches, as though the Mystery itself desired to remain veiled for eternity.

Oak Island: The Trail Across the Sea

Another rumor, passed down by mariners and voyagers of the New World, declareth that the sacred relics and the treasure of the Temple were carried beyond the seas unto the wild isle of Oak in Nova Scotia.

There is said to be a pit wondrously deep, hewn with manifold levels and tunnels wrought by the hand of man. Men say that a mysterious inscription once rested upon wood or stone, yet was lost, like a word entrusted unto the wind.

In the year seventeen hundred and ninety-eight, three young lads discovered the entrance of that abyss. But waters, flowing from secret channels, flooded it forthwith, and no man, unto this day, hath conquered its depths.

Orders That Claimed the Inheritance

From the year seventeen hundred and sixty-seven, the Strict Observance Clerks-Mason, arisen in Vienna, proclaimed that they held their doctrine from the Templars themselves.

In those troubled days arose many brotherhoods claiming heritage of the Temple: in seventeen hundred and eighty-two the Order of the Holy City was founded, followed by the lodges of Heredom of Kilwinning, affiliated with the Order of Saint Andrew of the Thistle in Scotland, the Grand Lodge of Stockholm in Sweden, and the Society of the Aloyau in Paris.

In Castile, Aragon, and Portugal, the kings refused to give the goods of the Temple unto the Hospitallers and founded the Order of Christ, direct heir of the banished knights, unto whom their spiritual jurisdiction was entrusted. Beneath that banner began, in the year fourteen hundred and

twenty, the great Portuguese navigations: ships bearing the red cross of the Temple sailed even unto the shores of India.

The Sicilian Trail

In Sicily likewise, the Templars possessed twelve commanderies, chiefly in Messina and in the southern heart of the isle. Frederick II, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, heir of Hohenstaufen and Aragon, reigned from the Baltic unto the Sicilian shores. Often was he at grievous variance with the popes, was excommunicated by Gregory IX and afterward by Innocent IV, and men murmured that one of these sought to poison him.

Conradin, his last grandson of the Hohenstaufen line, was taken and beheaded at Naples in twelve hundred and sixty-eight by Charles of Anjou, casting down forever that illustrious house. That same Charles, King of Sicily, desired to aid his older brother Saint Louis in the Crusade of Tunis and gained the support of the Templars, yet arrived too late to turn the course of fate.

Templars of Modern Times

In the year eighteen hundred and sixty-eight, an evangelical group estranged from Lutheranism founded a colony at Haifa, in the Holy Land. Favoring the restoration of Israel, they took unto themselves the name of Templars. They established many German colonies and lived in peace with their Jewish neighbors.

When England drove out the Ottomans in nineteen hundred and seventeen, these colonists were interned. During the Second World War the British authorities arrested them and exiled them unto Australia; certain youths among them bore sympathy unto the doctrines of Nazism.

Turns of Fortune in the Holy Land

The Templars held not kingdoms nor principalities after the manner of the Crusaders, but a chain of mighty fortresses and commanderies: Athlit, Safed, Gaza, Beaufort, Arsuf, Belvoir, Tortosa, Jerusalem, Acre, Sidon, Tyre, Tripoli, Haifa, and likewise those of the County of Tripoli, of the Principality of Antioch, and of Cilician Armenia. All these formed a military and logistical network without equal. Numerous are the remnants attributed unto their hand.

In Jerusalem they held two hospices: the *Domus Templi,* reserved for the brethren, and the hospice of the Temple Mount, destined for pilgrims and guests of rank. They were charged with defending the Temple Mount, and in the southern tunnels, pillars, vaults, and medieval alignments yet bear witness to their ancient presence.

In the year nineteen hundred and four-and-ninety, a Templar tunnel was discovered beneath the Crusaders' Tunnel at Acre. Later still, a symbol engraved upon a stone block was espied, and that which lieth behind the said stone hath not yet been revealed.

Epilogue

Thus doth the imprint of the Templars, laden with mystery and remembrance, pass through the ages unquenched. Though fire consumed their Order, no flame could scatter their legend, which abideth as a coal hidden beneath the ashes, casting still its glow and its secret.