



A Brief Resume on the History of the Knights Templar Part I

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Multitudes of pilgrims in the eleventh and twelfth centuries visited Jerusalem for the purpose of offering their devotions at the Holy Sepulcher of Christ and other Holy Places in Jerusalem. Many of these religious wanderers were weak, old, and mostly unarmed; and thousands of them were subjected to the hostilities of the hordes of Arabs who even after the capture of Jerusalem by the Christians continued to infest the sea coast of Palestine and the roads to Jerusalem.

Nine French Knights, the followers of Baldwin, united in the year 1118 in a military brotherhood and entered into a solemn pact to aid each other in clearing the roads and defending pilgrims in their passage to the Holy City. Two of these Knights were Hugh de Payens and Godfrey de St. Aldemar. They, along with seven others, took the usual vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience before the king of Jerusalem. They assumed the title Poor Fellow Soldiers of Christ. The Abbot of Jerusalem gave to them, as a place to store their arms and supplies, portions of the old Temple Mount and the street between the palace of the king and the temple whence they derived the name Templars.

Hugh de Payens journeyed to Europe to solicit a new crusade on behalf of Baldwin, and he presented his companions to Pope Honorius II from whom he craved permission to form a religious military order. The Pontiff referred them to the ecclesiastical Council which was then in session. Having presented his vocation and that of his companions to the Fathers, their request was granted. St. Bernard was directed to prescribe a rule for the new Order. In this rule, the knights of the Order were called *Pauperes commilitis Christie et Templi Salomonis*, or The Poor Fellow Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon.

Hugh de Payens returned to Jerusalem carrying with him many recruits from the noblest families of Europe. The Order prescribed for the professed knights white garments as a symbol of a pure life to which Pope Eugenius II later added a red cross to be worn on the left breast as a symbol of martyrdom. The Templars soon became preeminently distinguished as warriors of the cross. St. Bernard speaks in the warmest terms of their self denial, their frugality, their modesty, their piety, and their bravery. "Their arms are their only finery, and they use them with courage without dreading either the number or the strength of the barbarians. All their confidence is in the Lord of Hosts, and in fighting for his cause they seek a sure victory or a Christian and honorable death."

The banner or Beauseant of the order was half white and half black, indicative of peace to their friends but destruction to their foes. At their reception each Templar swore never to turn his back on his enemies but either to vanquish his foe or die. The word beau in medieval French meant a lofty state, for which translators have offered such terms as noble, glorious, and even magnificent. As a battle cry, the Beauseant was a charge to “Be noble” or “Be glorious.”

The Order very quickly grew from its simple beginnings to a complicated organization. By the twelfth century it was divided into three classes; Knights, Chaplains, and Serving Brethren. In the case of the Knights, whoever presented himself for admission into the Order was required to prove that he was born from a knightly family and was born in lawful wedlock; that he was free from all previous obligations; that he was neither married nor betrothed; and that he had not made any vows of reception into another Order. That further, he was not in debt, and finally, that he was of a sound and healthy constitution of body.

The Chaplains consisted only of laymen. They were required to serve a novitiate of one year. They were required to take the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Their duties were to perform all religious offices and to officiate at all the ceremonies of the Order. The Serving Brethrens' only qualification was that they should be free born and not slaves. They fought in the field under the Knights and performed at home, the menial offices of the household. Later this group was divided into two; Brethren at Arms and the Handicraft Brethren. The latter was the most esteemed group and remained in the preceptories to exercised their various trades.

To be continued next month with Part II