

TRANSCRIPTS



HOLYROOD ABBEY - TRIAL OF SCOTTISH KNIGHTS TEMPLAR

KING WILLIAM THE LION, in a charter under his great seal, granted between the years 1171 and 1177, addressed to "all the good men of his whole kingdom, French, English, Scots, and Galwegians," confirmed the monks of Holyrood in all that had been given them by his grandfather, King, David, too, other with many other gifts, including the pasture of a thousand sheep in Rumanach (Romanno ?) a document witnessed in the castle, " apud Edenbsbvrch "

In 1309, when Elias II. was abbot, there occurred an interesting event at Holyrood, of which no notice has yet been taken in any history of Scotland-the trial of the Scottish Knights of the Temple on the usual charges made against the order, after the terrible murmurs that rose against it in Paris, London, and elsewhere, in consequence of its alleged secret infidelity, sorcery, and other vices.

According to the Processus factus contra Templarios in Scotia, in Wilkins' " Concilia," a work of great price and rarity, it was in the month of December, 1309-when the south of Scotland was overrun by the English, Irish, Welsh, and Norman troops of Edward II., and John of Bretagne, Earl of Richmond, was arrogantly called Lieutenant of the kingdom, though Robert Bruce, succeeding to the power and popularity of Wallace, was in arms in the north-that Master John de Soleure, otherwise styled of Solerio, "chaplain to our lord the Pope," together with William Lamberton, Bishop of St. Andrews, met at the Abbey of Holyrood "for the trial of the Templars, and two brethren of that order undernamed, the only persons of the order present in the kingdom of Scotland, by command of our most holy lord Clement V." Some curious light is thrown upon the inner life of the order by this trial, which it is impossible to give at full length.

In the first place appeared Brother Walter of Clifton, who, being sworn on the Gospels, replied that he had belonged to the military order of the Temple for ten years, since the last feast of All Saints, and had been received into it at Temple Bruer, at Lincoln, in England, by Brother William de la More (whom Raynouard, in his work on the order, calls a Scotsman, and that the Scottish brother knights received the statutes and observances of the order from the Master of England, who received them from the Grand Master at Jerusalem and the Master at Cyprus.

He had then to detail the mode of his reception into the order, begging admission with clasped hands and bended knees, affirming that he had no debts and was not affianced to any woman, and that he "vowed to be a perpetual servant to the master and the brotherhood, and to defend the Eastern land; to be for ever chaste and obedient, and to live without his own will and property." A white mantle had then been put upon his shoulder (to be worn over his chain armour, but looped up to leave the sword-arm free); a linen coif and the kiss of fraternity were then given him. On his knees he then vowed it never to dwell in a house where a woman was in labour, nor be present at the marriage or purification of one; that from thence forward he would sleep in his shirt and drawers, with a cord girt over the former"

The inquisitors, who were perhaps impatient to hear of the four-legged idol, the cat, and the devil, concerning all of which such curious confessions had been made by the Florentine Templars, now asked him if he had ever heard of scandals against the order during his residence at Temple in Lothian, or of knights that had fled from their preceptories; and he answered :- "Yes; Brother Thomas Tocci and Brother John de Husflete, who for two years had been preceptor before him at Balantradoch (Temple), and also two other knights who were natives of England."

Being closely interrogated upon all the foolish accusations in the papal bull of Clement, he boldly replied to each item in the negative. Two of the charges were that their chaplains celebrated mass without the words of consecration, and that the knights believed their preceptors could absolve sins. He explained that such powers could be delegated, and that he himself "had received it a considerable time ago."

Sir William de Middleton, clad in the military order of the Temple, was next sworn and interrogated in the same manner. He was admitted into the order, he said, by Sir Brian le Jay, then Master of England, who was slain by Wallace at the battle of Falkirk, and had resided at Temple in Lothian and other preceptories of the order, and gave the same denials to the clauses in the bull that had been given by Clifton, with the addition that he "was prohibited from receiving any service from women, not even water to wash his hands."

After this he was led from the court, and forty one witnesses, summoned to Holyrood, were examined. These were chiefly abbots, priests, and even serving-men of the order, but nothing of a criminal nature against it was elicited; though during similar examinations at Lincoln, Brother Thomas Tocci de Thoroldby, a Templar, declared that he had heard the late Brian le Jay (Master of Scotland and afterwards of England) say a hundred times over, "that Christ was not the true God, but a mere man, and that the smallest hair out of the beard of a Saracen was worth any Christian's whole body;" and that once, when he was standing in Sir Brian's presence, certain beggars sought alms "for the love of God and our Blessed Lady," on which he threw a halfpenny in the mud, and made them hunt for it, though in midwinter, saying, "Go to your lady and be hanged!" Another Templar, Stephen de Stapelbrvgge, declared that Sir Brian ordered him at his admission to spit upon the cross, but he spat beside it.

The first witness examined at Holyrood was Hugh Abbot of Dunfermline, who stated that he had ever viewed with suspicion the midnight chapters and "clandestine admission of brethren." Elias Lord Abbot of Holyrood, and Gervase Lord Abbot of Newbattle, were then examined, together with Master Robert of Kydlawe, and Patrick Prior of the Dominicans in the fields near Edinburgh and they agreed in all things with the Abbot of Dunfermline.

The eighth witness, Adam of Wedale (now called Stow), a Cistercian, accused the Templars of selfishness and oppression of their neighbours, and John of Byres, a monk of Newbattle, John of Mumphat and Gilbert of Haddington, two monks of Holyrood, entirely agreed with him while the rector of Ratho maintained that the Scottish Templars were not free from the crimes imputed to the order, adding " that he had never known when any Templar was buried or heard of one dying a natural death, and that the whole order was generally against the Holy Church." The former points had evident reference to the rumour that the order burned their dead and drank the ashes in wine!

Henry de Leith Rector of Restalrig, Nicholas Vicar of Lasswade, John Chaplain of St. Leonard's, and others, agreed in all things with the Abbot of Dunfermline, as did nine Scottish barons of rank who added that " the knights were ungracious to the poor, practicing hospitality alone to the great and wealthy, and then only under the impulse of fear; and moreover, that had the Templars been good Christians they would never have lost the Holy Land."

The forty-first and last witness, John Thyng, who for seventeen years had been a serving brother of the order in Scotland, coincided with the others, adding, " that many brethren of the Temple, being common people , indifferently absolve excommunicated persons, saying that they derived power from their lord the Supreme Pontiff;" and also, " that the chapters were held so secretly that none save a Templar ever had access to them."

So ended the inquisition at Holyrood, "which could not be made more solemn on account of the daily incursions of "the enemy" i.e., the Scottish patriots under Bruce.

We may conclude that on the departure of John of Solerio, the preceptor and his companion were set at liberty ; but on the suppression of the order throughout Scotland, their vast possessions were given to their rivals, the Knights of St, John at Torphinchen.



