

## **'The Masonic Knights Templar – Today's 'Knights of Old'?'**

We are all members of '*The United Religious, Military and Masonic Orders of the Temple and of St John of Jerusalem, Palestine, Rhodes and Malta in England and Wales and Provinces Overseas*', commonly known in Masonic circles as the Knights Templar of the 'KTs'. But what does being a Masonic Knight Templar actually mean? Are we just a group of men who enjoy dressing in mediaeval military costume, pretending we are modern Crusaders? Are we just members of one of the ever proliferating Masonic Orders, which has a colourful and rather exotic ritual? Or is the Order of the Temple seeking to perpetuate the memory of the Templar Order founded for the protection of pilgrims to the Holy Land, and the guarding of the Holy Sepulchre?; Or are we members of a Christian Masonic Order whereby we attempt to lead a better life by following the example of the Mediaeval Knights Templar?

The answer is of course personal to each one of us, and indeed may be an answer which is a combination of all I have just posed. If you accept that Freemasonry, the Craft as we call it, is essentially a code of conduct which teaches us to lead a better life for ourselves, and the greater society, then perhaps as Masonic Knights Templar we are in fact Freemasons who use the Mediaeval Knights as an allegory to do just that.

Bro. Kts., you will remember how as youths we revelled in the romantic fiction of those doughty '**knights of old**', whose spirit of **chivalry** shed a glamour over the middle ages, chivalry being a code of conduct which flourished in western Europe from the 10<sup>th</sup> century to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This was the time of the Feudal System, under which a class of people arose who became known as Knights.

To attain the accolade of knighthood was esteemed the most honourable title a man could have, one which endowed him NOT with wealth or high worldly rank, but proclaimed him to be a valiant man; a man of moral value; who,

**either** in the dread discipline of war by doughty deeds, **or** in peace by loyalty and good living, had won his spurs honourably.

The Chivalric Code had its origins from this body of knighthood, fostered by the Christian Church. The **God of Peace** was also often called the **God of Battles**, for the Church said '*If a man will fight, and the hearth and home must be protected, the virgin safeguarded, - let them fight magnanimously; righteously; let the sword be consecrated to the Service of Christ; to succour the weak*'. These knights were gentlemen and they enlisted the aid of the Church whose teachings were in accordance with their own hearts.

Following a very solemn and inspiring service, including an overnight vigil, the young aspiring Knight, after confession and taking Holy Communion, was given the accolade of Knighthood. He was then sworn to the ancient rules of Chivalry which he had to obey. Some of these rules were:

- a. He would fear, reverence and serve God religiously; combat for the faith with all goodwill; and rather die a thousand deaths than deny his faith.
- b. He would sustain the rights of the feeble, such as widows, orphans and virgins, by hazarding his life in their service, provided he could do so consistently with his own honour, and with his duty towards his sovereign or superior.
- c. He would be incited to good actions not by the hope of reward, or gain, or profit, but for the glory and virtue alone.
- d. That he would faithfully observe his word and pledged honour.

A perfect Code of Honour, but perhaps too good to be true in practice?

Possibly, but the good Knight on his way through this earthly journey, who might stumble (**and who amongst us here this evening has not stumbled?**) but at the remembrance of his vows would pick himself up again and struggle onwards. He might sully the bright mirror of chivalry by human frailties, but through his conscience would strive to retrieve his lost honour.

Some of the rules and statements I have mentioned above will surely resonate with you not only through our Knight Templar oaths and rituals, but also through our Craft tenets and principles.

Though the age of Chivalry has passed, its influence still instils a spirit of gentleness and knightly courtesy in some men's hearts, and I would suggest that that is especially so amongst Freemasons in general and in our own beloved Order of the Temple, where we attempt to emulate those ***'Knights of Old'*** by our own code of chivalry, although we do not of course call it that, and that therefore The Masonic Knights Templar are indeed today's ***'Knights of Old'***.

**VE Kt Frank Johnston, PG Registrar.**