

## *The Trial of the Knights Templars in England*

THE sudden arrest and trial of the Knights Templars and the dissolution of the order is one of the most dramatic episodes of the middle ages. The question of their guilt or innocence has called forth protracted discussion in which the evidence obtained at the trials in France has been carefully scrutinised. Outside France there were fewer Templars, the evidence against them often failed to substantiate the charges, and historians have paid less attention to its details and the means by which it was secured. The fall of Acre in 1291 had left the Christians without a foothold in Syria, and the chief reason for the existence of the military orders was removed. Nevertheless, the Templars continued the warfare from their headquarters in Cyprus and probably would not have fallen but for the attack of Philip IV of France, whose exchequer needed replenishing. On 13 October 1307 he had all the Templars of France arrested as heretics and put to torture to secure immediate confessions.<sup>1</sup> A trusty clerk was sent to urge a similar policy on Edward II of England, but he refused to credit the evil reports against the order<sup>2</sup> till he received a papal bull setting out the guilty confessions of its leaders and requiring the arrest of all Templars.<sup>3</sup> Under the combined influence of Philip and the pope, Edward II sent out sealed writs ordering his officers to arrest all the Templars in England, Scotland, and Ireland and to make inventories of their goods.<sup>4</sup> Every precaution was taken that no suspicion of their arrest should leak out, and the king's orders were duly executed between 9 and 11 January 1308 in England<sup>5</sup> and on 3 February in Ireland.<sup>6</sup>

In most of the counties of England, the Templars were taken to the central castle of the county, but their imprisonment was far from strict.<sup>7</sup> William de la More, grand preceptor of England, and two brethren with him in Canterbury Castle were given their beds,

<sup>1</sup> Michelet, *Procès*, i. 36, 37, 67, 75.

<sup>2</sup> Rymer, *Foedera*, ii. 10, 19, 20.

<sup>3</sup> Public Record Office, Papal Bulls, bundle 10, no. 40, printed in Rymer, ii. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Claus. 1 Edw. II, m. 13 and 13 d.

<sup>5</sup> L.T.R. Enrolled Accounts, Misc., rolls 18–20.

<sup>6</sup> K.R. Accounts Exchequer, bundle 239, no. 13.

<sup>7</sup> L.T.R. Enrolled Accounts, Misc., roll 18, m. 1, 29; roll 19, m. 1, 2 d; roll 20, m. 5, 6 d, 7, 15, 16, 26.

robes, and silver vessels, and allowed to go outside the city at will without a guard.<sup>8</sup> More received a stipend of 2s. 6d. a day, and each of the others 6d.<sup>9</sup> On 27 May 1308 he was set free, the bishop of Durham having given security for him,<sup>10</sup> and on 4 June the king ordered two knights and one serving brother to be allowed to accompany their master.<sup>11</sup> On 23 July a royal order required the delivery to him of six Temple manors appraised by local juries at 107l. 8s. 8d. per year, in return for a payment of 7l. 1s. 3d. a year to the exchequer, provision of sustenance for six brother Templars besides his suite, and the performance of the accustomed services to the lords of the fees.<sup>12</sup> William de Grafton, preceptor of Yorkshire, was by royal order placed in the keeping of Henry de Percy and received pay for a boy to serve him, besides his own stipend of sixpence per day.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, during the time the king held the Temple lands he ordered that each Templar should receive the liberal allowance of fourpence a day for his support, to be paid from the income of the lands.<sup>14</sup> Evidently Edward II did not intend any unnecessary severity towards them.

The generous treatment accorded to More was not long continued: on 28 November 1308 orders were issued for the sheriffs to seize the manors given him, to arrest him and all other Templars found in their bailiwicks, and to guard the prisoners more securely.<sup>15</sup> It is possible that this increase of severity towards the Templars was due to papal influence, for on 12 August 1308 Clement V issued several bulls regulating the procedure to be followed in regard to them. The bull '*Faciens misericordiam*' directed the bishops, in conjunction with the inquisitors appointed by the pope, to secure evidence from the members of the order on a series of articles charging them with various heresies, the essentials of which were that at reception into the order a neophyte was required by the preceptor thrice to renounce Christ and spit upon the crucifix; that indecent kisses were exchanged between the preceptor and the neophyte; that the belts worn by the brethren had been consecrated to idolatry by being wound around the head of an idol which was

<sup>8</sup> L.T.R. Mem. Excheq. 1 Edw. II, Hil. brev. irretorn.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*; K.R. Mem. Excheq. 1 Edw. II, Hil. recorda, m. 43 d.

<sup>10</sup> L.T.R. Enrolled Accounts, Misc., roll 18, m. 1, roll 20, m. 6 d; Rymer, ii. 46.

<sup>11</sup> K.R. Mem. 1 Edw. II, Trin. brev. baronibus, m. 31 d. Michael de Baskeville, Preceptor of the New Temple, London, and John de Stoke, treasurer there, were delivered to William de la More '*cum equitatura et harnesio suo*;' L.T.R. Enrolled Accounts, Misc., roll 20, m. 3.

<sup>12</sup> L.T.R. Mem., 1 Edw. II, Trin. commis. dorse.

<sup>13</sup> L.T.R. Mem., 1 Edw. II, Trin. recorda dorse; 2 Edw. II, Mich. brev. irretorn. and L.T.R. Enrolled Accounts, Misc., roll 20, m. 40.

<sup>14</sup> K.R. Mem., 1 Edw. II, Hil. brev. return.; L.T.R. Mem., 1 Edw. II, Trin. brev. irretorn., 2 Edw. II, Mich. brev. irretorn. dorse; *Cal. of Close Rolls*, 1307-1313, p. 90; K.R. Extents, no. 16, m. 24 (temporary classification in the Public Record Office).

<sup>15</sup> L.T.R. Mem., 2 Edw. II, Mich. brev. irretorn. and Mich. brev. return. dorse.

worshipped in the chapters; that the priests of the order failed to consecrate the host in celebrating mass, and the brethren did not believe in the sacrament of the altar; that a cat was worshipped in their chapters; that the grand master or preceptor could absolve from all sin; that the brethren were ordered not to confess to priests not members of the order; and that all were required to gain property for the order by every possible means, right or wrong.<sup>16</sup> After the individual brethren had been examined, provincial councils were to be summoned and their guilt or innocence determined. Other bulls provided for all details of the attack on the order.<sup>17</sup>

The papal inquisitors did not arrive in England till about 18 September 1309 and only then were the Templars brought from the counties to London, Lincoln, or York for their trial.<sup>18</sup> From 20 October to 18 November 1309 the papal inquisitors and the bishop of London<sup>19</sup> diligently questioned the forty-three brethren in the Tower, but all upheld the innocence of their order.<sup>20</sup> Regarding their customs of confession and absolution, a question on which they afterwards proved vulnerable, only two gave answers which were in the least unorthodox, and these merely asserted that they ought to confess only to their chaplains in the order.<sup>21</sup> Ralph de Barton, in describing their custom of absolution, stated that the grand master could absolve brethren in chapter for infractions of the vow or the rule, but did not interfere in regard to secret sins because he was a layman. Other brethren said essentially the same.<sup>22</sup>

During the examinations the inquisitors tried in vain to induce several recently initiated brethren to leave the order. Five of these individually answered the repeated exhortations of their examiners that they would rather die than desert the order.<sup>23</sup> Could any organisation corrupted by heresy and crime have inspired such loyalty? If these seven new brethren—the only ones whom the inquisitors attempted to bring over—had been subjected to such indignities at initiation as the papal charges represent, is it unreasonable to suppose that they would have gladly accepted the first opportunity of desertion? Theirs was not the sort of testimony which the

<sup>16</sup> Dugdale, *Monasticon Angl.* vi. 846–847.

<sup>17</sup> *Regest. Clement. V.*, nos. 3626, 3628–3633, 3584, 3585, 3400, 3401, 3515, 3516, 3641, 5100, &c.

<sup>18</sup> Pat. 3 Edw. II, m. 34; Claus. 3 Edw. II, m. 21 and 21 d.; Rymer, ii. 88, 90–91. Deodatus, Abbot of Lagny, and Sicard de Vaur, Canon of Narbonne, were the only foreign inquisitors who came to England. To these were attached the archbishop of York and the Bishops of Durham, Lincoln, and Chichester. Others were appointed, but did not serve: Rymer, ii. 55.

<sup>19</sup> The latter was ordered by the king to be present at every inquisition: Claus. 3 Edw. II, m. 22 d., Rymer, ii. 88.

<sup>20</sup> Bodleian MS. 454, fol. 1, 11 b–12 *et seq.*

<sup>21</sup> Bodl. MS. 454, fol. 32–33; Brit. Mus., Cotton MS. Julius B. xii. fol. 76.

<sup>22</sup> Bodl. MS. 454, fol. 14 b. and 24.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* fols. 28, 42, 44, 46, 50; Cotton MS. Julius B. xii. fol. 74, 78, 81, 82.

inquisitors wanted, and so they proceeded to question a number of outsiders, but with little better success. They were at a loss what to do, for English law did not allow the use of torture to obtain confessions from prisoners. Under the system of justice established by the Plantagenet kings the courts regarded the common opinion of the country, shown by the jurors of the neighbourhood, as sufficient evidence of guilt. The canonists however were evolving a very rigorous law of evidence which for full proof required the accordant testimony of two unimpeachable witnesses who had themselves seen the crime committed.<sup>24</sup> Such proof was rarely available, especially in trials for heresy, and so in order to eke out scanty evidence and secure conviction, every effort was made to induce the accused to confess. The charges against the Templars were of such a nature that sufficient proof could not be obtained from outsiders. Hence it was necessary that confessions should be secured from the members of the order, and to this end the inquisitors set themselves to introduce, temporarily at least, the Continental procedure with torture, and persevered till they succeeded. On 11 December 1309 all the suffragan bishops at the provincial council of Canterbury supported the inquisitors and petitioned the king for power to proceed against the Templars according to ecclesiastical law, and for orders requiring the royal officers to obey him in this.<sup>25</sup> On the 15th he yielded and gave the desired orders.<sup>26</sup>

On 29 January 1310 a second examination was begun, in which a series of new and cunningly devised questions was used with no better success.<sup>27</sup> Five brethren showed that they misunderstood the power of their chaplains to absolve; but all of the thirty-four questioned denied or knew nothing of any heretical practices, declared that lay absolution was of no avail and was not practised, and firmly asserted the innocence of the order.<sup>28</sup> Evidently satisfactory means for reducing the prisoners to submission were not yet at hand, for on 8 February 1310 writs were sent out ordering the jailers to obey the prelates and inquisitors, and help them to deal with the Templars according to ecclesiastical law, and appointing William de Dien to oversee the work of torture.<sup>29</sup> Early in March solitary confinement was ordered,<sup>30</sup> and the prisoners at London questioned a third time, but to no

<sup>24</sup> Pollock and Maitland, *History of English Law*, ii. 659-660.

<sup>25</sup> Wilkins, *Concilia*, ii. 313-314.

<sup>26</sup> Pat. 3 Edw. II, m. 25.

<sup>27</sup> Bodl. MS. 454, fol. 63 b, Wilkins, ii. 349.

<sup>28</sup> This testimony is given in full in Bodl. MS. 454, fol. 64 b-81. Wilkins abbreviated it greatly and omitted many important statements.

<sup>29</sup> Pat. 3 Edw. II, m. 30. William de Dien was required to help the prelates and inquisitors 'tam in separatione huiusmodi quam in articione, in victualibus, carceribus, et questionibus ipsis Templariis secundum legem ecclesiasticam predictam faciendis, quousque secundum legem ipsam in ipso inquisitionis negotio veritas sciri possit.'

<sup>30</sup> *Cal. of Close Rolls*, 1307-1313, pp. 196, 200; Bymer, ii. 104.

purpose.<sup>31</sup> Apparently the royal orders to separate the prisoners and allow torture to be used had not been obeyed, for on 8 March they were repeated.<sup>32</sup> On 1, 2, and 10 April the inquisitors questioned twenty Templars imprisoned at Lincoln, but secured no evidence of interest.<sup>33</sup> At York, where the inquisitors were busy from 27 April to 4 May, the results were more definite. Two Templars asserted that the pope had granted their chaplains greater power of absolution than other priests,<sup>34</sup> and several more made damaging admissions regarding absolution from sin by the visitor or the grand master. Three of these said that the master or grand preceptor could absolve from sin, though they had not seen it done.<sup>35</sup> Another, who had been a member of the order for thirty years, said that the grand master or visitor could absolve brethren from the seven mortal sins if they sought mercy in chapter and penance was imposed by the said preceptor and convent, and for such sins no further confession need be made to a priest unless directed by the preceptor. He said they were sent to priests for secret lapses, and that from other sins, except simony and the canon '*si quis suadente*,' the grand master or visitor absolved whenever they came to him.<sup>36</sup> Later references to the lax imprisonment of the Templars at York make it improbable that these statements were extracted by torture, and the unanimity and vehemence with which the same men denied all other charges against the order seem to show that its members really misunderstood the orthodox doctrine of absolution.

Encouraged by these results, the inquisitors returned to Lincoln. The general trend of the testimony obtained was that the master formally remitted, as far as he had authority, all sins which the brothers had been unwilling to confess from weakness of the flesh or fear of the order's justice.<sup>37</sup> When William de la More, grand preceptor of England, was questioned about this, he described two ceremonies which took place in chapter. In one, when a brother entered the chapter with bare back (having previously admitted his offence), the presiding officer struck him thrice with whips, and said, 'Brother, ask God to forgive you,' and to those present, 'And you, brothers, ask God to forgive him, and say *Pater Noster*.' More asserted that he said no more, except to warn the

<sup>31</sup> Bodl. MS. 454, fol. 81 b-86. Wilkins (ii. 352-6) omits the testimony of several witnesses.

<sup>32</sup> Rymer, ii. 104.

<sup>33</sup> Bodl. MS. 454, fol. 103-115.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* fol. 129 a. In fact the rule (article 269, Curzon, p. 165) stated, 'Les frères chapelains doivent oyr les confessions des frères; ne nul frère ne se doit confesser a autre part fors que a lui, par que il puisse avoir le frère chapelain sans congé. Car il en ont greignoir pooir de l'apostoile (meaning the pope) d'eaus assoudre que un arcevesque.'

<sup>35</sup> Bodl. MS. 454, fol. 126-129, 131-132.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* fol. 126.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* fol. 115-116; Wilkins, ii. 367.

offender not to repeat his offence, and denied that he said 'I absolve you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.' On the other hand, when he held general chapter, More stated that he was accustomed to say, after prayer, that those who did not confess their sins or who stole any alms belonging to the order could not share in its spiritual goods. Other sins which they dared not confess, from frailty of the flesh or fear of the order's justice, he himself remitted for them, as far as he could, by the power granted to him by God and the lord pope. This custom, More said, was kept throughout the realm. Twenty-three other Templars corroborated More's statements with some slight variations in language.<sup>38</sup>

After all their labour the inquisitors had got very little valuable evidence against the accused, and were profoundly disgusted with the obstacles which had prevented them from using the methods employed in France. Before 16 June 1310 they drew up a long document addressed to the archbishop of Canterbury, telling of their efforts and their ill success. Though their nominee had been appointed at their request<sup>39</sup> to supervise and carry out tortures, they complained that they found no one who would proceed to the effective execution of this work, notwithstanding their frequent and insistent commands.<sup>40</sup> Though the bishops and curates ought to investigate and extirpate heresy in their dioceses and parishes, they themselves had come from the Roman church to do this; but now that they had done their duty as well as possible, they claimed the right to return to the holy see, leaving the archbishop and his suffragans to finish the work. They protested that in England direct procedure ought to be used according to the canons, as was done in France and other realms, and therefore proposed to the archbishop eight ways by which the affair of the Templars could be finished more quickly.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Bodl. MS. 454, fol. 88-90. Wilkins (ii. 356-7) printed only a part of this evidence in full and wholly omitted one witness. Cotton MS. Julius B. xii. fol. 80 gives the testimony of nos. 1-18 in full. William de Sautre corroborated More's statements about general absolution, but 'interrogatus an presidens capitulo quando flagellat fratrem qui recognovit delictum dicat "Remitto tibi in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti," respondit quod sic, et fecit ipsum absolvi per fratrem presbiterum."

<sup>39</sup> Apparently the inquisitors had laid their grievances before the king or his council, for in answer to their complaint it had been stated that 'dominum W. de Den habuerunt ad nominationem propriam: si ille non placeat, nominent alium; et idem de custodibus carcerum: ' Cotton MS. Julius B. xii. fol. 83 a.

<sup>40</sup> 'Et specialiter quia nec in commentariensibus nec in custodibus templariorum nec in ministris regis nec in domino Willielmo de Den milite deputato executionem questionum faciendam nichil utilis et fidelis efficacie executionis questionum reperimus nec volunt procedere ad executionem predictarum questionum licet per nos et ex parte nostra fuerint legitime et cum magna instancia pluries requisiti: ' Cotton MS. Julius B. xii. fol. 83 a.

<sup>41</sup> 'Protestantes quod ecclesia in regno isto debet sibi vindicare viam regiam et quod procederetur in regno isto directe secundum canones sicut proceditur in regno Francie

These eight methods throw much light on the attitude of the king and his officers towards the Templars and their prosecutors. The first suggestion is to relieve the king of the expense of providing jailers for the Templars, and appoint others subservient enough to guard the prisoners more closely and carry out *artaciones et separationes et utiles exhortationes de dicenda veritate et habebitur fidelis custodia ut possent secretius et cautius questiones fieri*, none of which the king allows to be done at present. Plainly the inquisitors were convinced that they could not get results as long as the officers of the king were in charge of the prisons.<sup>42</sup> The second suggestion is that each Templar's stipend of fourpence a day be given to the ordinaries, along with the Temple houses, &c.<sup>43</sup> A third way is to use the remission of sins by laymen, the one practice admitted by all Templars which may be found heretical, to secure the condemnation of individual brethren, and thus provide sufficient cause for condemning the order and give the inquisitors opportunity to use torture whenever and wherever they see fit. A fourth way is to give the Templars every opportunity for purgation to prove their innocence, a way more merciful than just. A fifth way is to adopt the procedure of local law toward those who refuse to submit to the inquisition: that is, to feed them on bread without water one day and the next on water without food, in order that by such moderate tortures as wretched lodgings and scanty food they may be forced to tell the truth, even though they be not otherwise tortured. A sixth plan, approved by all the prelates, is that all the Templars be sent to Ponthieu, where they can be tortured, since it is outside England, though the property of the English king. In this matter the holy see ought to be consulted, because it is disgraceful that the inquisitorial procedure cannot be duly used in England to correct such great infidelity.<sup>44</sup> The seventh suggestion is that the confessions and announcements of France and other realms be read

et in aliis regnis et dominiis . . . canonice et ordinate, infrascriptas vias proponimus reverende paternitati vestre . . . simplicissimas set tamquam preparatorias ad predicta et tamquam magis expedienter (*sic*) quam si negocium . . . ' Cotton MS. Julius B. xii. fol. 83 a.

<sup>42</sup> 'Et nichil fidelis custodie vel fidelis executionis fieri possit quamdiu dominus Rex teneat templarios sicut sciunt omnes qui preterita et presenciam facta vident: ' Cotton MS. Julius B. xii. fol. 83 a.

<sup>43</sup> It is uncertain whether the Templars' stipends were paid regularly during 1810 and 1311. There is no definite record of such payments being made, and they may have been tortured by semi-starvation during the last few months of their imprisonment. The fourpence a day in English money was certainly worth more than the twelve deniers a day (in debased coin) which the Templars received at Paris.

<sup>44</sup> 'Sexta via est quam multum amplectuntur omnes prelati, quod mitterentur in Pontivum qui est terra Regis Anglie vel alibi extra Angliam, et quod ibi questionarentur; et in hoc articulo consulenda esset sedes apostolica, quia magna confusio et plaga ecclesie videretur quod in tam magno et tam nobili et catholico membro ecclesie non posset libere, ut deberet, procedi ad inquisitionem, correctionem, vel ordinationem tante infidelitatis: ' Cotton MS. Julius B. xii. fol. 83 b.



to the English Templars and be published throughout England, so that torture may be used without popular clamour. The eighth is that the ordinaries of other realms be asked in aid of the law to furnish enough witnesses or their testimony to condemn certain individuals in England, and thus enable more severe measures to be taken against the others.<sup>45</sup>

While exerting every possible influence to remove the obstacles to their success, the inquisitors probably reported their difficulties to the pope. On 6 August 1310 Clement wrote to Edward II bitterly reproaching him for not allowing the use of torture and thus hindering the work of the inquisition against heresy.<sup>46</sup> Accordingly, on 26 August 1310, Edward ordered the Templars in the Tower to be delivered to the sheriffs of London whenever requested by the inquisitors, to be guarded by the sheriffs and produced whenever required by the inquisitors for the application of ecclesiastical law.<sup>47</sup> This was repeated 6 October, and again with some modifications on 23 October.<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile the adjourned provincial council of Canterbury met on 22 September and, after hearing and discussing the results of the examinations, ordered that the Templars in London and Lincoln should be separated from each other in London and be again examined. If no further confessions should result from such *arctationes et separationes*, the council decreed that they should be put to torture, provided this should not involve mutilation, perpetual disablement of any member, or effusion of blood.<sup>49</sup> It is evident that the inquisitors still found obstacles in their way, for we have no record of any confessions secured.

On 23 December Clement V again wrote to Edward II in similar vein to his previous letter, offering him remission of sins and the eternal mercy of God, if he would only support the inquisitors and cause the whole affair to be transferred to Ponthieu where there would be no hindrance to the inquisition.<sup>50</sup> During the long interval in which they had secured no additional evidence from the imprisoned

<sup>45</sup> In the manuscript these suggestions are followed by a letter of Ralph Baldock, bishop of London (dated 23 June 1310) enclosing a letter of the archbishop (dated 17 June), directing the bishops to reassemble in provincial council on Wednesday, 23 September. He then states that on 16 June the two papal inquisitors communicated certain petitions and ways for proceeding against the Templars, a copy of which he encloses that all may be prepared to give unanimously a prompt and fitting answer.

<sup>46</sup> *Regest. Clem. V*, no. 6378. At the same time the English bishops were condemned for negligence and urged to help the inquisitors. *Ibid.* no. 6376.

<sup>47</sup> *Cal. of Close Rolls*, 1307-1313, p. 279; Rymer, ii. 115.

<sup>48</sup> *Cal. of Close Rolls*, 1307-1313, pp. 285-290; Rymer, ii. 117, 118.

<sup>49</sup> Wilkins, *Concilia*, ii. 314. According to the decision of the council, the Lincoln Templars were brought to London and re-examined 30 March 1311, but their testimony was of little importance. *Cal. of Close Rolls*, 1307-1313, p. 291; Bodl. MS. 454, fol. 118-124.

<sup>50</sup> *Regest. Clem. V*, no. 6670. In accordance with the sixth suggestion of the inquisitors (*supra*, p. 438).



brethren, the inquisitors had been busy collecting stories from numerous sources. Despairing now of better evidence, they made a compilation of this material to bolster up what little the prisoners had given. Seventy-five witnesses are numbered in the manuscript copy of the document, but, of these, numbers 26–35 are wholly lacking, with no apparent reason for their omission, number 1 is the preceptor of Ireland; numbers 22 and 25 are two French brethren received in England, who confessed all the wickedness desired by the inquisitors of France; number 61 is the same as number 1; and the number 21 is prefixed to a statement by the inquisitors, there being no witness 21. Only six of the sixty non-Templar witnesses on the list were not ecclesiastics, and of these one was a woman under the influence of a mendicant friar, three were men of the common sort, and only two were knights.<sup>51</sup> The evidence was almost entirely hearsay. Very few could name even one living man from whom the story had come, and in most cases the persons named had heard the tale from some one else not named. The stories themselves were extremely fantastic and improbable in character, remarkable productions of overheated imaginations, based largely on the secrecy of the Templar ceremonies.

In the meantime, the complaints of obstruction drew from Edward II at Berwick further detailed orders specifically requiring that the Templars should be imprisoned separately in fetters and be tortured.<sup>52</sup> The execution of these orders appears to have brought no results till early in June, when after a vigorous search<sup>53</sup> several fugitives were captured and brought to London. About 10 June 1311 Stephen de Stapelbrugge was arrested, and admitted that he was a member of the order.<sup>54</sup> The sheriffs were directed to imprison

<sup>51</sup> Bodl. MS. 454, fol. 91a–100a. Wilkins (ii. 358–364) omitted much of this material. There are two other compilations of testimony given by outsiders in England, one the ‘*Deminutio Laboris examinantium processus contra ordinem Templi in Anglia, quasi per modum rubricarum*’ found by Schottmüller in the Vatican archives (Schottmüller, *Untergang*, ii. 78–102), and the other contained in *Annales Londonienses* (Stubbs, *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II*, R.S., i.) 180–198. The former gives the testimony of seven witnesses who do not appear in the summary in the Bodleian manuscript, while omitting some found in the latter. The summary in *Annales Londonienses* is to a great extent a condensation of the ‘*Deminutio*,’ some parts being wholly omitted and nearly all being condensed: it was evidently made after the inquisitors had succeeded in obtaining the full confessions from three English Templars which receive due emphasis as the most valuable evidence. The ‘*Deminutio*’ would surely have included these had it been compiled after they were obtained—that is, after 23 June 1311. This seems to invalidate Schottmüller’s conclusion (*Untergang*, ii. 75–77) that the compilation was made for use at the council of Vienne.

<sup>52</sup> Claus. 4 Edw. II, m. 8.

<sup>53</sup> The archbishop of Canterbury ordered careful inquiry to be made as to the whereabouts of fugitive Templars: Reg. Winchelsey (Lambeth Palace Library), fol. 59b. Cf. also Claus. 4 Edw. II, m. 4. Two fugitives had been captured before the first examination but could not be induced to confess.

<sup>54</sup> Rymer, ii. 128.

him and to deliver him to the inquisitors when required. The machinery of torture had been well oiled by this time and without doubt was quickly set at work on this new and untried victim. On 23 June he was brought before the inquisitors in the house of Radulf Spron and sworn. He stated that there were two receptions into the order: the first was good but the second was wicked. He said he was initiated first about eleven years before, and again about a year later, in the presence of Brian de Jay, then master in England, Thomas de Thoroldeby, Radulf de Malton, and three other brothers now deceased, when two brothers (Thomas de Thoroldeby and another) stood behind him and with drawn swords compelled him from fear of death to deny Christ with his mouth and spit on his hand near the cross. He stated his belief that this mode of reception was uniform and that each brother was received the second time thus, and he confessed the truth of almost all the other charges.<sup>55</sup> On 25 or 26 June Thomas Tocci de Thoroldeby, twice a fugitive, was brought in for examination. He gave a clear account of the process of confession in chapter, stating that when a brother sought mercy for any offence, discussion took place as to whether it should be considered a *defalta* or a *peccatum*. If the former, the president imposed penance; if the latter, the priest imposed penance in all cases except the two wholly reserved for the pope. He said the secret reception ought to be done away with because of the suspicion it aroused; he admitted that the brothers were urged to confess to none but brother chaplains, and that it was forbidden in chapter to confess to the Mendicants; but he denied all the other charges against the order. After an interval he was again questioned, and added that he believed the confessions of the French Templars, because he had been present in the Roman court and had heard several of them confess, but he never believed a layman could absolve. Asked if he had seen Stephen de Stapelbrigge received, he said, '*nescit nisi de unica receptione de ipso vel de aliquo alio fratre facta, sed, ut memoriae suae occurrit,*' he believed that he and John de Moun were present fourteen years ago with brothers William de la More, Thomas de Tholouse, Thomas de la Fenne, and others. He described his escape from Lincoln Castle and said that while on the Continent he talked with six Templars who had been received by Imbert Blanke and had been obliged to deny Christ and spit on the cross. Knowing the insistence with which the inquisitors had demanded the use of torture, we may well believe that most of these plainly improbable statements were thus extorted. On 29 June Tocci was again examined and this time admitted that he denied Christ and spat near the cross, made a full confession similar to that of

<sup>55</sup> Wilkins ii. 383-384.

Brother Stephen, including a retraction of his previous deposition about chapter absolution, and ended with a statement that all in the order of Templars were guilty of illicit absolution or some other illicit deed.<sup>56</sup> On 1 July John de Stoke, chaplain, was brought out again for examination. This time he confessed that he had denied Christ under compulsion, but would admit none of the other charges.<sup>57</sup>

In estimating the testimony of these three Templars, the manifest contradictions should be noted. Were the witnesses telling the truth at the first or the last examination? Considering the difficulty of using torture in England, it is not unreasonable to suppose that only at these last examinations did the torture at all approach the severity of that employed at first in France. Practically all the French Templars at Paris confessed at their first examination; but many retracted the false confessions which the fierceness of the torture had drawn from them, as they said. Nearly all the English Templars steadfastly maintained their innocence, and the few who did confess yielded only at last. Tocci and Stoke had previously denied the charges, and the latter admitted only a part of them even at the last. Thus his statements do not agree with the confessions of the other two. Had those been true, there would have been no especial object in John's concealing the spitting after admitting the denial; but, if we assume that they were extorted by torture, as we have a right to do, this discrepancy is easily explicable. Still submissive, Brother Stephen appeared before the inquisitors on 27 June, ratified his confession, abjured his errors, and sought reunion with the church. Hitherto Brother Thomas could not be brought to confess that he had with drawn sword helped to force Brother Stephen to deny Christ, but now at last he made this addition to his previous confession.<sup>58</sup> The two were then formally reconciled to the church, and John de Stoke followed on 3 July.

These successes aroused hopes that the grand preceptor himself might give way. Every effort was made to induce him to abjure the heresy with which he was charged, but he refused, saying that he would not abjure crimes he had never committed. The inquisitors were however more successful with the other brethren and by 12 July had induced fifty-nine to abjure the errors of which they were accused and from which they could not clear themselves. They were then received back into the church and the next day the council decreed that they should be separated and sent to

<sup>56</sup> Wilkins, ii. 384-387.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 387-388.

<sup>58</sup> As the record says, 'multipliciter monitus et exhortatus ut errores confiteretur de quibus non posset se defendere vel purgare, demum dictus Thoma saniori spiritu ductus veniam ab archiepiscopo postulavit.' Bodl. MS. 454, fol. 165; Wilkins ii. 389.

various monasteries to do penance.<sup>59</sup> Apparently the only Templars left at London were William de la More, the grand preceptor of England, and Imbert Blanke, preceptor of Auvergne. The former was reserved to the jurisdiction of the pope, and died in the Tower, on 20 December 1312;<sup>60</sup> the latter, like More, stoutly refused to abjure errors he had never committed.<sup>61</sup> The council did not decree *executionem de corpore ipsius faciendam*, but ordered that he be locked in double irons and taken to the vilest prison to be kept there and visited occasionally to learn if he would confess.<sup>62</sup> With the means of persuasion now at the disposal of the inquisitors it is a wonder, not that three Templars confessed, but that More, Blanke, and the great bulk of the brothers refused to do likewise. At the end of the Bodleian MS. account of the trials, the writer gives a brief summary of what he could not write in detail, such as the separation of the Templars, the constant accusation of the three brothers who had confessed, and the various other devices used by the bishops in person, by their clerks, and by severe and cruel laymen using judgment of blood who were sent to terrify the Templars and induce them to disclose the truth.<sup>63</sup> Though the detailed account of this, which the writer says can be found in the daily acts of the council, is not extant, the mere summary is an illuminating commentary on the whole trial, showing plainly that for once inquisitorial methods and procedure were employed in England.

At York the Templars appear to have been treated with far greater leniency. Unlike the council of the Southern Province, the provincial council of York was greatly in doubt as to whether torture ought to be used to force them to confess,<sup>64</sup> and only after the news of the three confessions obtained at London does it appear that the prisoners were kept closely bound by iron fetters and severely treated.<sup>65</sup> After considerable discussion it was decided that each one should abjure all heresy; and accordingly twenty-four of them did so on 29 July 1311, were formally absolved, and sent singly to do penance in various monasteries.<sup>66</sup>

In Scotland only two Templars were arrested; they were carefully examined on 17 November 1309 by the bishop of St. Andrews and a deputy of the papal inquisitors in England. Both

<sup>59</sup> Wilkins, ii. 391.

<sup>60</sup> L.T.R. Enrolled Accounts, Misc., roll 18 m. 47 d; Rymer, ii. 198.

<sup>61</sup> Bodl. MS. 454, fol. 100-101.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* fol. 170 a; Wilkins, ii. 393. This order was probably executed, for a royal command of 6 April 1313 required Imbert Blanke to be delivered to R. archbishop of Canterbury or his deputy to be dealt with according to ecclesiastical law. Claus. 6 Edw. II, m. 8; *Cal. of Close Rolls*, 1307-1313, p. 523.

<sup>63</sup> Bodleian MS. 454 fol. 170.

<sup>64</sup> Walter de Hemingburgh, *Chronicon*, ed. by H. C. Hamilton, ii. 286-287.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 292.

<sup>66</sup> Wilkins, ii. 400. These twenty-four included the two examined in Scotland.

stoutly denied all the charges except that the masters and preceptors of the order had some power of absolution granted by the pope.<sup>67</sup> The inquisitors then proceeded to examine all outsiders who could be induced to give unfavourable testimony,<sup>68</sup> but they obtained little beyond vague suspicions and some evidence of avarice.<sup>69</sup>

The examination of the Templars in Ireland was likewise conducted by three deputies of the papal inquisitors and several Irish ecclesiastics.<sup>70</sup> All but two of the fourteen were questioned three times, and two endured the test a fourth time. Their answers show peculiar variations such as we do not see in England or Scotland except in the case of the three full confessions at London, and on the second and third examinations several witnesses retracted damaging statements.<sup>71</sup> None of the grosser charges were confessed, but six admitted that the preceptors could and did absolve them from sin, though later two of these emphatically denied it.<sup>72</sup> The three first questioned admitted that the brethren swore to increase the property of the order in every possible way right or wrong, but declared that they themselves regarded this as a great sin. All the others denied the fact, and one of the three retracted at his third examination.<sup>73</sup> In addition to these and other admissions, two brothers, though refusing to admit that they had committed any of the crimes charged, told a number of extravagant stories about foreign Templars. Henry Danet, preceptor of Ireland, said:

quod in capitulo celebrato in Cipro vidit quemdam fratrem Hugonem de la Rothe qui non credebat sacramento altaris nec aliis sacramentis . . . Vidit etiam quamplures fratres dicti ordinis et maxime de Catalonia de regno Portugalie qui non bene credebant sacramento altaris nec aliis sacramentis.

He denied the first articles about the foul reception, but added that he had heard that a certain Brother Hugo de Empures denied the catholic faith and went over to the Sultan of Babylon when Tortosa was captured. He had heard also that a certain preceptor of Pilgrim Castle in Syria obliged many brothers to deny Christ at reception, but he did not know the names of the preceptor or the brothers so received. Though he denied that the Templars worshipped idols, he said that he had heard that a certain brother of Catalonia had in his custody a double-faced brazen head which

<sup>67</sup> Wilkins, ii. 380; Spottiswoode, *Miscellany*, i. 7-16.

<sup>68</sup> Bodl. MS. 454, fol. 157-159.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. J. Edwards, 'The Templars in Scotland in the Thirteenth Century,' in *Scottish Historical Review*, v. 13-25.

<sup>70</sup> The examinations appear to have been continued from the last of January 1310 down to 23 May. Cf. Herbert Wood, *The Templars in Ireland*, in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, vol. xxvi. section C, no. 14, p. 352.

<sup>71</sup> Several of these retractions, variations, and additions of scandalous stories are not to be found in Wilkins, but are given in Bodl. MS. 454, fol. 134-150.

<sup>72</sup> Bodl. MS. 454, fol. 143 a and 145 a.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* fol. 148 a.

answered all questions.<sup>74</sup> Such contradictory statements must have been the result of torture. Forty-one outsiders, including thirty-seven monks and three members of the inquisitorial committee, were also questioned, but gave no important evidence.

What then shall we decide as to the guilt or innocence of the Templars as shown by the evidence of those in the British Isles? Excluding, as we must, such contradictory testimony as was most probably extorted by torture, the only charges which have real weight are those regarding confession and absolution, for the secrecy of the initiations and chapters and the absence of period of probation before admission to the order are not incriminating unless substantial proof of wrong-doing is adduced. The charge that they had usurped sacerdotal prerogatives was an after-thought not included in the preliminary list of charges which the inquisitor William of Paris sent out in September 1307 to guide his subordinates in the expected trials of the Templars; and, as the procedure in England shows, it was not emphasised till the later examinations, when the dearth of other incriminating evidence was perceived. Mr. H. C. Lea<sup>75</sup> has shown that they were monks entitled to the privileges of monachism and their chapters were essentially the same as those of the Cistercians, confessionals in which each brother was required to confess his sins and receive punishment as penance.<sup>76</sup> In 1128, when the Templars first received their rule, there was nothing strange in entrusting the administration of the rites of confession, absolution, and satisfaction to the head of the Temple house who as a monk had a semi-sacerdotal character. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries even a layman could in certain cases hear confession and grant absolution, and the Templars' absolution in chapter was not in the least contrary to the doctrine and practice of the twelfth-century church and was well known to the popes and had their full approval. As the opinion of the theologians gradually changed, the Templars added regular sacramental confession and absolution to their early simple forms. In 1163 they obtained the right to receive priests into their order, and when possible they confessed to them; otherwise they kept to the original system of confession and absolution in the weekly chapters. Since auricular confession to a priest in private was less humiliating and easier for the sinner, it practically

<sup>74</sup> In answer to article 46, he said, 'quod numquam scivit vel alias audivit quod fratres dicti ordinis talia ydola vel capita haberent, set bene audivit quod quidam frater dicti ordinis de partibus Catalonie cuius nomen ignorat habebat quoddam capud eneum,' etc. : Bodl. MS. 454. fol. 139 William de Kilros, chaplain, was questioned four times, and made several additions to his first testimony but nothing so startling as Henry Danet. Bodl. MS. 454, fol. 149 b.

<sup>75</sup> 'The Absolution Formula of the Templars,' in *Papers of the American Society of Church History*, v. 37-58.

<sup>76</sup> Curzon, *Règle du Temple*, articles 463-473, 499, 533.



supplanted the original capitular confession and penance, as zeal lessened and demoralisation increased in the order, and the formula of absolution used by the preceptor was changed to pardon for concealed sins. Though chapters were still held, this absolution by the preceptor could not be sacramental, since it lacked confession, and it effected only reconciliation with the order, not complete pardon. Under this new system, it was of course desirable that the brethren should confess at least three times each year and only to their own chaplains. The rule requiring confession only to priests of the order could not have been generally obeyed in England, perhaps because of the small number of chaplains, for fifteen Templars expressly and flatly denied the existence of any prohibition of confession to outside priests, and sixty-seven wholly denied the article of the papal bull in which its existence was asserted.

The complete testimony taken in England fully corroborates these explanations. Thomas de Tholosa, a knight who had been in the order forty-three years, stated concisely that the priests absolved them sacramentally by confession and the master absolved them from transgressions against the order. It is not surprising that some few brothers failed to grasp the distinction between sacramental absolution and the formal remission of penalties for transgression of the rules of the order. Military men and men of affairs could not be expected to keep fully abreast of current theological opinion. Four of the Yorkshire Templars appear to have believed the absolution given by the grand master or the grand preceptor of England to be true sacramental absolution, such as was prescribed for chapters by the early rule.<sup>77</sup> Their statements do not appear unorthodox when tested by the rule of 1127. Three others at York distinguished sacramental absolution by the priest as being above the mere absolution of the master from transgressions or from venial or forgotten offences. More and other leaders of the order described and carefully distinguished the old form of capitular administration of penance by the presiding officer after the brother had admitted his offence, from the general remission of sins not confessed, which could not be sacramental absolution.<sup>78</sup> More also emphatically denied the use of the formula *Ego te absolvo*, without which Thomas Aquinas asserted that there was no absolution.<sup>79</sup> Many of the brethren knew nothing of either of these forms of absolution, and only a few knew of the old

<sup>77</sup> Evidently it was not regarded by all as complete sacramental absolution, otherwise none would later have confessed the same to a priest.

<sup>78</sup> When examining the Lincoln Templars in London, the inquisitors tried their best to secure admissions that the absolution from sins not confessed given by the master in chapter was valid without further confession; but they were unsuccessful. Only the first Templar yielded at all, and he said the master's absolution *quodammodo valet*.

<sup>79</sup> Lea, *ubi supra*, pp. 45-46.



capitular confession, which was rapidly becoming obsolete. The first two Scotch Templars seem to have believed the absolution in chapter to be sacramental, though their ideas were confused. Even in Ireland, where there is strong probability that effective torture was employed, only six brethren admitted that preceptors could absolve, and it is not unlikely that they still believed in the old capitular absolution, and that their words were garbled by the inquisitors to the effect that the preceptors actually exercised sacerdotal functions. Thus on the most important of the heresies the inquisitors can prove to us only that the Templars had failed to keep pace with orthodox theological opinion regarding confession and absolution, and while the evidence does not conclusively prove that all the brethren were completely innocent of the misdeeds with which they were charged, a detailed study of the testimony and the ways by which it was obtained must lead to the conclusion that the full confessions of crime were extorted by the inquisitorial procedure with torture temporarily established in England, and that the guilt of the Templars was not proved.

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