

Knights and Freemasons  
The Birth of Modern Freemasonry

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and Albert Pike

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A Cornerstone Book  
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Published by Cornerstone Book Publishers  
Charlottesville, VA & New Orleans, LA

Foreword reprinted with permission from  
*The Plumbline*, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 1, 7, 1998  
The Scottish Rite Research Society

*Freemasonry and the Crusades, Transition from Operative to Speculative Freemasonry,  
Organization of the Grand Lodge of England and The Early Years of Speculative  
Freemasonry in England* from *History of Freemasonry* by Albert Mackey. *Knight  
Kadosh* from *Morals and Dogma* by Albert Pike and *The Order of the Temple* from  
the unfinished *The History of Freemasonry in France* by Albert Pike.

First Cornerstone Edition - 2005

[www.cornerstonepublishers.com](http://www.cornerstonepublishers.com)

ISBN: 1-887560-66-1

MADE IN THE USA

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Knights & Freemasons  
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# *Freemasonry and the Crusades*

*by Albert Mackey*

IN all the legendary history of Freemasonry there is nothing more interesting or more romantic than the stories which connect its origin with the Crusades; nothing in which the judgment and reasoning powers have been more completely surrendered to the imagination of the inventors of the various theories on this subject or to the credulity of the believers.

Before proceeding to discuss the numerous phases which have been given by different writers to the theory which traces the origin of Freemasonry to the Crusades, to the chivalric orders of the Middle Ages, and especially to the Knights Templars, it will be proper to take a very brief view of those contests between the Christians and the Saracens which, under the name of the Crusades, cost Europe so vast an amount of blood and treasure in the unsuccessful attempt to secure and maintain possession of the Holy Land. This view, or rather synopsis, need not be more than a brief one, for the topic has been frequently and copiously treated by numerous historians, from Joinville to Michaux and Mills, and must therefore be familiar to most readers.

About twenty years after the Moslems had conquered Jerusalem, a recluse of Picardy in France had paid a pious visit to the city. Indignant at the oppressions to which the Christians were subjected in their pious pilgrimages to the sepulcher of their Lord, and moved by the complaints of the aged patriarch, Peter the Hermit - for such

is the name that he bears in history - resolved on his return to Europe to attempt to rouse the religious sentiment and the military spirit of the sovereigns, the nobles, and the populace of the West. Having first obtained the sanction of the Roman pontiff, Peter the Hermit traveled through Italy and France, and by fervent addresses in every place that he visited urged his auditors to the sacred duty of rescuing Palestine from the hands of infidels. The superstitious feelings of a priest-governed people and the military spirit of knights accustomed to adventure were readily awakened by the eloquence of a fanatical preacher. In every city and village, in the churches and on the highways, his voice proclaimed the wrongs and the sufferings of pious pilgrims, and his reproaches awoke the remorse of his hearers for their past supineness and indifference to the cause of their brethren, and stimulated their eagerness to rescue the sacred shrines from the pollution of their Saracen possessors.

The spirit of enthusiasm which pervaded all classes of the people - nobles and priests, princes and peasants - presented a wonderful scene, which the history of the world had never before and has never since recorded. With one voice war was declared by the nations of Western Europe against the sacrilegious Moslems. Tradesmen abandoned the pursuits by which they were accustomed to gain their livelihood, to take up arms in a holy cause; peasants left their fields, their flocks, and their herds; and barons alienated or mortgaged their estates to find the means of joining the expedition.

The numerous conflicts that followed for the space of two hundred years were called the Crusades from the blood-red cross worn by the warriors on the breast or shoulder, first bestowed at the council of Clermont, by Pope Urban, on the Bishop of Puy, and ever afterward worn by every Crusader as a badge of his profession.

The first detachment of the great army destined for a holy war issued, in the year 1096, from the western frontiers. It consisted of nearly three hundred thousand men, composed for the most part of the lowest orders of society, and was headed by Peter the

Hermit. It was, however, a huge, undisciplined mob rather than an army, whose leader was entirely without military capacity to govern it or to restrain its turbulence.

The march, or rather the progress, of this immense rabble toward Asia Minor was marked at every step by crime. They destroyed the towns and plundered the inhabitants of every province through which they roamed in undisciplined confusion. The outraged inhabitants opposed their passage with arms. In many conflicts in Hungary and in Bulgaria they were slaughtered by the thousands. Peter the Hermit escaped to the mountains, and of his deluded and debased followers but few reached Constantinople, and still fewer the shores of Asia Minor. They were speedily destroyed by the forces of the Sultan. The war of the Crusades had not fairly begun before three hundred thousand lives were lost in the advance guard of the army.

The first Crusade was undertaken in the same year, and speedily followed the advanced body whose disastrous fate has just been recorded. This body was composed of many of the most distinguished barons and knights, who were accompanied by their feudal retainers.

At the head of this more disciplined army, consisting of a hundred thousand knights and horsemen and five times that number of foot-soldiers, was the renowned Godfrey of Bouillon, a nobleman distinguished for his piety, his valor, and his military skill.

This army, although unwieldy from its vast numbers and scarcely manageable from the diverse elements of different nations of which it was composed, was, notwithstanding many reverses, more fortunate and more successful than the rabble under Peter the Hermit which had preceded it. It reached Palestine in safety, though not without a large diminution of knights and soldiers. At length Jerusalem, after a siege of five weeks, was conquered by the Christian warriors, in the year 1099, and Godfrey was declared the first Christian King of Jerusalem. In a pardonable excess of humility he refused to accept a crown of gems in the place where his Lord and Master had worn a crown of thorns, and contented himself with the titles of Duke and Defender of the Holy Sepul-

cher.

In the course of the next twenty-five years Palestine had become the home, or at least the dwelling-place, of much of the chivalry of Europe. The Latin kingdom of Jerusalem had extended eastward from the shores of the Mediterranean Sea to the deserts of Arabia, and southward from the city of Beritus (now Beirut), in Syria, to the frontiers of Egypt, besides the country of Tripoli, which stretched north of Beritus to the borders of the principality of Antioch.

The second Crusade, instigated by the preaching of the monk St. Bernard, and promoted by Louis VII of France, was undertaken in the year 1147. The number of knights, soldiers, priests, women, and camp followers who were engaged in this second Crusade has been estimated as approaching a million. At its head were the Emperor Conrad III of Germany and King Louis VII of France. This effort to relieve and to strengthen the decaying Christian power in Palestine was not a successful one. After a futile and inglorious attempt to take the city of Damascus, whose near vicinity to Jerusalem was considered dangerous to the Latin kingdom, Louis returned home with the small remnant of his army, in 1149, and was followed in the succeeding year by the Emperor Conrad. Thus ended abortively, the second Crusade, and the Christian cause in Palestine was left to be defended by the feeble forces but invincible courage of the Christian inhabitants.

The next thirty-five or forty years is a sad and continuous record of the reverses of the Christians. They had to contend with a new and powerful adversary in the person of the renowned Saracen, *Sal-lah-ud-deen*, better known as Saladin, who, after sixteen years of warfare with the Christian knights, in which he was sometimes defeated but oftener a victor, succeeded in taking Jerusalem, on the 2d of October, in the year 1187.

Thus, after a possession by the Christians of eighty-eight years, the city of Jerusalem and the holy shrine which it contained fell again into the power of the Moslems.

When the tidings of its fall reached Europe, the greatest sorrow and consternation prevailed. It was at once determined to make

a vigorous effort for its rescue from its infidel conquerors. The enthusiasm of the people for its recovery was scarcely less than that which had preceded the first and second Crusades under the eloquent appeals of Peter the Hermit and St. Bernard. The principal sovereigns of Europe, Spain alone excepted, which was engaged in its own struggles for the extirpation of the Moors, resolved to lead the armies of their respective nations to the reconquest of Jerusalem. Thus was inaugurated the third Crusade.

In the year 1188, innumerable forces from England, France, Italy, and other counties rushed with impetuous ardor to Palestine. In the year 1189 one hundred thousand Crusaders, under Guy de Lusignan, sat down before the city of Acre. The siege lasted for two years, with a vast consumption of lives on both sides. At length the city capitulated and the Mussulmans surrendered to the victorious arms of Richard the Lionhearted, King of England.

This third Crusade is remarkable for the number of European sovereigns who were personally engaged in it. Richard of England, Philip Augustus of France, Frederick Barbarossa of Germany, and the Dukes of Suabia and of Burgundy, had all left their dominions to be governed by regents in their absence and had joined in the pious struggle to redeem the Holy Land from Mohammedan rule.

But, notwithstanding many victories over Saladin in hard-fought fields, and the conquest of many important places, such as Acre, Ascalon, Jaffa, and Caesarea, the Crusaders failed in their great design of recovering Jerusalem, which still remained in the possession of Saladin, who, however, having made a truce with King Richard, granted, as one of the terms, free and undisturbed access to all pilgrims who should visit the holy city.

Thus terminated the third Crusade. It can scarcely be called an absolute failure, notwithstanding that Jerusalem still remained in the hands of the infidels, but the total ruin with which, at its commencement, the Latin kingdom had been threatened was averted; the conquering progress of the Mussulmans had been seriously checked; the hitherto victorious Saladin had been compelled to make a truce; the greater part of the seacoast of Palestine, with

all its fortresses and the cities of Acre, Jaffa, Antioch, and Tyre, remained in the possession of the Christians.

Saladin had survived the truce which he had made with Richard but a few months, and on his death his dominions were divided between three of his sons and his brother Saphadin. The last of these, to whom most of the veterans who had fought under Saladin adhered, secured for himself sovereignty in Syria.

The death of their renowned and powerful foe had encouraged the Christians of Palestine to make renewed efforts to recover Jerusalem as soon as the truce had expired. To aid in this design, a new Crusade was invoked in Europe. The appeal, heard with apathy in England and France met with more favor in Germany. Three large armaments of German chivalry arrived at Acre in 1195. The campaign lasted, however, less than two years, and the troops, having affected no decisive results, were recalled to Germany in consequence of the death of the Emperor Henry VI. This, which has been dignified by some writers with the name of a fourth Crusade, has, however, more generally been considered as a mere episode in the history of the Holy Wars.

The fourth Crusade proper began in the year 1203, when a large armament of knights and men-at-arms of France, Germany, Italy, and Flanders sailed for Constantinople in transports furnished by the Venetians and commanded by the blind Doge Dandolo. The throne of the Byzantine Empire had been usurped by the elder Alexius, who had imprisoned his brother, the legitimate monarch, after having caused his eyes to be put out. The first object of the Crusaders was to dethrone the usurper and to restore the government to Isaac and his son, the younger Alexius, who had instigated the enterprise and accompanied the expedition.

The siege and the conquest of Constantinople are told in the graphic language of Gibbon; but it is so wholly unconnected with the subject of our present inquiry as not to claim further attention. It is sufficient to say that by it the Crusaders were entirely diverted from the great object for which they had left Europe. None ever reached or sought to reach the land of Palestine, and the fourth Crusade terminated without a blow having been struck for the re-

covery of Jerusalem and the deliverance of the Holy Sepulcher from the pollution of its Paynim possessors.

The fifth Crusade commenced in the year 1217. In this war the Crusaders attacked Egypt, believing that that country was the key to Palestine. At first they were successful, and besieged and captured the city of Damietta. But, influenced and directed by the cupidity and ignorance of the papal legate, they refused the offer of the Saracens, that if the Christians would evacuate Egypt they would cede Jerusalem to them, they continued the campaign with most disastrous results, and, finally abandoning the contest, the Crusaders returned to Europe in 1229, never having even seen the shores of the Holy Land.

A sixth Crusade was undertaken by the French in 1238. They were subsequently joined by Richard, Earl of Cornwall, the nephew of Richard the Lionhearted. The military capacity and prowess of this able leader led to successful results, and in 1240 to the restoration of Jerusalem to the Christians. The Crusade ended with the return of the Earl of Cornwall to England in 1240.

The fortifications of Jerusalem were rebuilt by the Knights Templars, but the necessary measures for defense had scarcely been completed when the Christian kingdom was attacked by a new enemy. The descendants of those barbaric tribes of Tartars who, under the name of Huns, had centuries before overwhelmed the Roman Empire, now commenced their ravages in Asia Minor. Twenty thousand Turcoman horsemen, under Barbacan, their chief, assisted by Egyptian priests, were enabled in 1242 to wrest Jerusalem from the Christians, who never again recovered it. The war continued with scarcely varying disasters to the Christians. Palestine was overrun by the barbarous hordes of Turcomans. The Moslems of Damascus, Aleppo, and Ems, forgetful of their ancient hatred and religious conflicts, united with the Knights Templars to oppose a common enemy.

But the effort to stay the progress of the Turcoman invasion was vain. Every city of the Latin kingdom, such as Tiberias, Ascalon, Jaffa, and others, were conquered. Acre alone remained to the Christian chivalry, and the Holy Sepulcher was again in the pos-

session of the infidels.

A seventh Crusade was commenced in 1245, to recover what had been lost. It was undertaken by the chivalry of England and France. Louis IX commanded the French portion of the forces in person, and William Longsword, who had distinguished himself in the fifth Crusade, with many other English knights and nobles, vowed that they would serve under his banner.

Egypt was again made the objective point of the expedition, and after an unnecessary and imprudent delay of eight months at Cyprus, Louis sailed, in 1248, for Egypt, with a force of fifty thousand men. The history of this Crusade is but a narrative of the defeats of the Christians, by the arms of their enemies, by famine, and by pestilence. At Mansora, in 1250, the Crusaders were totally routed; thirty thousand Christians were slain, among them the flower of the French and English chivalry, and King Louis himself was taken prisoner. He was only ransomed by the surrender of Damietta to the Turks, the conquest of which city had been almost the only successful trophy of the Christian arms. The king proceeded to Acre, almost the only possession of the Christians in Syria, and soon afterward returned to France, thus ending the seventh and penultimate Crusade, in the year 1254.

For fourteen years Syria and Palestine were left to the inadequate protection that could be afforded by the Knights Templars and Hospitallers, two Orders who even in the face of their common foe could not restrain their own bitter rivalry and dissensions. These feelings culminated at length in a sanguinary battle between them, in which the Templars were almost completely destroyed.

The Latin kingdom of Palestine being thus enfeebled by the intestine broils of its defenders, city after city was surrendered to the Moslems, until Acre alone remained in the hands of the Christians. In 1268 the heaviest blow was inflicted by the fall of Antioch, the proud capital of Syria. Forty thousand Christians were slain at the time of its surrender and one hundred thousand were sold into slavery.

The fall of the Christian state of Antioch was a catastrophe that once more aroused the military ardor and the pious spirit of Eu-

rope, and a new Crusade was inaugurated - the eighth and last - for the recovery of the Holy Land, the restoration of the Latin kingdom, and the extirpation of the infidels from the sacred territory.

This Crusade was conducted entirely by Prince Edward, afterward Edward I of England. It is true that Louis IX of France, undeterred by the disasters which had previously befallen him, had with undiminished ardor sought to renew his efforts for the recovery of the Holy Sepulcher, and sailed from France for that purpose in 1270. But he had stopped short at Tunis, the king and people of which he had hoped to convert to Christianity. But, although no decisive battles took place between the Moors and the Christians, the army of the latter was soon destroyed by the heat of the climate, by fatigue, by famine and pestilence, and the king himself died but little more than a month after his arrival on the shore of ancient Carthage. Prince Edward had joined the French army at Tunis with a slender body of knights, but, after the death of the French monarch and the abandonment of the enterprise, he had sailed for Syria with an army of only one thousand knights and men-at-arms, and landed at Acre in 1270. But the knights of the chivalry of Palestine gathered eagerly around his standard and increased his force to seven thousand. With this insignificant body of soldiery, weak in numbers but strong in courage and in the capacity of their leader, Edward attacked the immense horde of Moslems who had been besieging Acre, caused them to retire, and, following them to Nazareth, captured that city, after a battle in which the infidels were defeated with great slaughter.

But the reduction of Nazareth closed the military career of Edward in Palestine. After narrowly escaping death from a poisoned wound inflicted by a Moslem assassin, he returned to England, in 1271, having first affected a truce of ten years with the Sultan of Egypt.

The defense of Palestine, or rather of Acre, the only point occupied by the Christians, as the titular capital of the Latin kingdom, was left to the knights of the three Orders of Chivalry, the Templars, the Hospitallers, and the Teutonic knights. By them the truce was repeatedly violated and peaceable Moslem traders often plun-

dered. Redress for these aggressions having been demanded in vain, the Sultan at length determined to extirpate the "faithless Franks," and marched against Acre with an army of two hundred thousand men.

After a siege of little more than a month, in which prodigies of valor were performed by the knights of the three military orders, Acre was taken, in 1271, by assault, at the cost of sixty thousand Christian lives. The inhabitants who did not submit to the Moslem yoke escaped to Cyprus with the remains of the Templars, the Hospitallers, and the Teutonic knights who had survived the slaughter.

Thus, after a sanguinary contest of two hundred years, the possession of the Holy Land was abandoned forever to the enemies of the Cross.

Thus ends the history of the Crusades. For fifty years afterward the popes endeavored to instigate new efforts for the recovery of the holy places, but their appeals met with no response. The fanatical enthusiasm which had inspired the kings, the nobles, and the knights of Europe for two centuries had been dissolved, and the thirst for glory and the love of arms were thenceforth to be directed in different channels.

It is not my intention to inquire into the influence exerted by the Crusades on the state of religion, of education, of commerce, or of society in Europe. The theme is an interesting one, but it is foreign to the subject of our discussion, which is the possible connection that may have existed between them and the origin of Freemasonry. But, in so far as they may have favored the growth of municipal freedom and the perpetuation of the system of chivalry, it may be necessary in a future part of this discussion that these points should demand some attention.

In the present point of view, the most important subject to attract our attention is the organization during the Crusades of three military Orders of Knighthood, the Knights Hospitallers, the Knights Templars, and the Teutonic Knights. It is through these, but principally through the second, that the attempt is made to find the origin of the Masonic institution in the time of the Crusaders.

Whatever may have been the origin of the institution of chivalry, whether from the equestrian order of the Romans, from the Scandinavians, the Arabians, the Persians, or, what is far more probable, from the peculiar influences of the feudal system, it is certain that form of knighthood which was embodied in the organization of religious and military orders took its rise in Palestine during the wars of the Crusades, and that before that era no such organizations of knighthood were known in Europe.

The Knights Hospitallers of St. John, now better known as the Knights of Malta, was the first of the military and religious Orders that was established in Palestine. Its origin must be traced to the Hospitallers of Jerusalem, a purely charitable institution established by certain merchants of Amalfi, in the kingdom of Naples, who, trading in the East, built hospitals in Jerusalem for the entertainment and relief of poor and sick pilgrims, about the middle of the 11th century. After the first Crusade had begun, many knights, laying aside their arms, united with the Hospitallers in the pious task of attending the sick. At length Gerard, the Rector of the Hospital, induced his brethren to assume the vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity, and to adopt a peculiar costume consisting of a black robe bearing; a white cross of eight points on the left breast. This was in the year 1099. The knights, however, continued their peaceful vocation of attending the sick until 1118, when Gerard, having died, was succeeded by Raymond de Puy as Rector. The military spirit of Raymond was averse to the monastic seclusion which had been fostered by his predecessor. He therefore proposed a change in the character of the society, by which it should become a military order devoted to the protection of Palestine from the attacks of the infidels. The members gladly acceded to this proposition, and, taking new vows at the hands of the Patriarch of Jerusalem, the military Order of Knights of St. John of Jerusalem was established, in the year 1118. The Order continued to reside in Palestine during its occupation by the Christians of the Latin kingdom, taking an active part in all the wars of the eight Crusades.

When the city of Acre fell beneath the victorious army of the Sultan of Egypt, the Hospitallers, with the knights of the other two

Orders, who had escaped the slaughter which attended the siege and followed on the surrender, fled to Cyprus. Thence they repaired to the island of Rhodes, where they remained for two hundred years under the title of the Knights of Rhodes, and afterward permanently established themselves at Malta, where, with a change of name to that of the Knights of Malta, they remained until the island was taken possession of by Napoleon, in the year 1798. This was virtually the end of the career of these valiant knights, although to this day the Order retains some remnant of its existence in Italy.

The Order of Knights Templars was established in the year 1118 by Hugh de Payens, Godfrey de St. Aldemar, and seven other knights whose names history has not preserved. Uniting the characters of the monk and the soldier, they took the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience in the presence of the Patriarch of Jerusalem; Baldwin, the King of Jerusalem, assigned them as a residence a part of his palace, which stood near the site of the former Temple, and as a place for an armory the street between the palace and the Temple, from which circumstance they derived their name of Templars. The Templars took a most active part in the defense of Palestine during the two centuries of the Crusades. They had also established houses called Preceptories in every country of Europe, where many of the knights resided. But the head of the Order was always in Palestine. At the close of the contests for the conquest of the Holy Land, when Acre fell and the Latin kingdom was dissolved, the Templars made their escape to Europe and were distributed among their various Preceptories.

But their wealth had excited the cupidity and their power the rivalry of Philip the Fair, King of France, who, with the assistance of a corrupt and weak Pope, Clement V, resolved to extirpate the Order. Charges of religious heresy and of moral licentiousness were preferred against them; proofs were not wanting when proofs were required by a King and a Pontiff; and on the 11th of March, 1314, De Molay, the Grand Master, with the three principal dignitaries of the Order, were publicly burnt at the stake, fifty-four knights having suffered the same fate three years before.

The Order was suppressed in every country of Europe. Its vast

possessions were partly appropriated by the different sovereigns to their own use and partly bestowed upon the Knights of Malta, between whom and the Templars there had always existed a rivalry, and who were not unwilling to share the spoils of their ancient adversaries. In Portugal alone they were permitted to continue their existence, under the name of the Knights of Christ.

The Teutonic Knights, the last of the three Orders, was exclusively German in its organization. Their humble origin is thus related: During the Crusades, a wealthy gentleman of Germany, who resided at Jerusalem, built a hospital for the relief and support of his countrymen who were pilgrims. This charity was extended by other Germans coming from Lubeck and Bremen, and finally, during the third Crusade, a sumptuous hospital was erected at Acre, and an Order was formed under the name of Teutonic Knights, or Brethren of the Hospital of our Lady, of the Germans of Jerusalem. The rule adopted by the knights closely resembled that of the Hospitallers or Templars, with the exception that none but Germans could be admitted into the Order.

Like the knights of the other two Orders, they remained in Palestine until the fall of Acre, when they returned to Europe. For many years they were engaged in a crusade for the conversion of the Pagans of Prussia and Poland, and afterward in territorial struggle with the Kings of Poland, who had invaded their domains. After centuries of contests with various powers, the Order was at length abolished by Emperor Napoleon, in 1809, although it still has a titular existence in Austria.

In an inquiry into any pretended connection of the Crusaders with Freemasonry, we may dismiss the two Orders of the Knights of Malta and the Teutonic Knights with the single remark that in their organization they bore not the slightest resemblance to that of Freemasonry. They had no arcana in their system, no secret form of initiation or admission, and no methods of recognition. And besides this want of similarity, which must at once preclude any idea of a connection between the Masonic and these Chivalric Orders, we fail to find in history any record of such a connection or the faintest allusion to it.

If Freemasonry owed its origin to the Crusades, as has been asserted by some writers, or if any influence was exerted upon it by the Knights who returned to Europe after or during these wars, and found Freemasonry already existing as an organization, we must look for such connection or such influence to the Templars only.

The probabilities of such a connection have been based upon the following historic grounds. The Knights Templars were a secret society, differing in this respect from the other two Orders. They had a secret doctrine and a secret ceremony of initiation into their ranks. This secret character of their ceremonies was made the subject of one of the charges preferred against them by the pope. The words of this charge are that "when they held their chapters, they shut all the doors of the house or church in which they met so closely that no one could approach near enough to see or hear what they were doing or saying." It is further said, in the next charge, that when they held their secret chapter "they placed a watchman on the roof of the house or church in which they met, to foresee the approach of any one."

Again, it is supposed that the Templars had held frequent and intimate communication with some of the secret societies which, during the Crusades, existed in the East, and that from them they delved certain doctrines which they incorporated into their own Order and introduced into Europe on their return, making them the basis of a system which resulted, if not in the creation of the entire Masonic institution, at least in the invention of the high degrees.

While it may not be possible to sustain this theory of the intercommunion of the Templars and the secret societies of the East by any authentic historical proof, it derives some feature of possibility, and perhaps even of probability, from the admitted character of the Templar Knights during the latter days of their residence in Palestine. They have not been supposed to have observed with strictness their vows of chastity and poverty. That they had lost that humility which made them at first call themselves "poor fellow-soldiers of Christ" and adopt as a seal two knights riding on

one horse, is evident from the well-known anecdote of Richard I of England, who, being advised by a zealous preacher to get rid of his three favorite daughters, pride, avarice, and voluptuousness, replied: "You counsel well. I hereby dispose of the first to the Templars, the second to the Benedictines, and the third to my bishops." In fact, the Templars were accused by their contemporaries of laxity in morals and of infidelity in religion. The Bois du Guilbert drawn by the graphic pen of Walter Scott, although a fiction, had many a counterpart in history. There was, in short, nothing in the austerity of manners or intolerance of faith which would have prevented the Templars of the Crusades from holding frequent communications with the infidel secret Societies around them, The Druses, indeed, are said by some modern writers to have Templar blood in them, from the illegal intercourse of their female ancestors with the Knights.

Of these secret Societies three at least demand a brief attention, from the supposed connection of the Templars with them. These are the Essenes, the Druids, and the Assassins. The Essenes were a Jewish sect which at the time of the Crusades were dwelling principally on the shores of the Dead Sea. Of the three schools of religion which were cultivated by the Jews in the time of our Savior, the Pharisees and the Sadducees were alone condemned for their vices and their hypocrisy, while neither He nor any of the writers of the New Testament have referred in words either of condemnation or of censure to the Essenes. This complete silence concerning them has been interpreted in their favor, as indicating that they had not by their doctrines or their conduct incurred the displeasure of our Lord or of his disciples. Some have even supposed that St. John the Baptist, as well as some of the evangelists and Apostles, were members of the sect - an opinion that is at least not absurd; but we reject as altogether untenable the hypothesis of De Quincey, that they were Christians.

Their ceremonies and their tenets are involved in great obscurity, notwithstanding the laborious researches of the learned Ginsburg. From him and from Josephus, who is the first of the ancient writers who has mentioned them, as well as from Philo