

spiracy it truly was—and in a short time the Knights were accused of the most monstrous and contradictory crimes, by a host of witnesses, whose depositions were either bought or forced from them by the rack, or imprisonment, or other fashionable method of torture then pursued. When the French Templars became aware of these accusations, they applied to the Pope, begging that the matter should undergo investigation; this petition was several times repeated; but Clement V., who had been raised to the Popedom by French interest, and who had transferred the seat of the Popedom of Rome to Avignon, was a subservient ally to Philip le Bel, and consented to leave the trial and fate of the Knights in his hands.

On the 13th of October, 1307, Philip took possession of the palace of the Temple, in Paris, and threw the Grand Master, and all the Knights that were with him, into prison. At the same time—at the very same hour, (so nicely was the plot regulated)—the Templars were seized in all parts of France. Every captive was loaded with chains, and treated with the utmost barbarity. An atrocious inquisition forged letters of the Grand Master to criminate the Order, and applied the most horrible tortures to the Knights. In Paris alone, thirty-six Knights died on the rack, maintaining their innocence with their latest words; others, with less capability, of enduring exquisite anguish, confessed to the charges of crimes which were, in some cases, impossible; at least, at the present day, few of our people will believe that the Templars invited the devil to their secret orgies, and that he frequently attended their conclaves in the form of a tom-cat!

But even the Knights whose firmness gave way under torture, recanted their confessions in their dungeons, and nothing remained uncontradicted, except the revelations of two members of the community—men of infamous character, who had been previously condemned to perpetual imprisonment by the Grand Master, and who both came to a shameful end subsequently, though they were now liberated and rewarded. Two years of a dreadful captivity, with infernal interludes of torture, and the conviction forced on their minds that Philip le Bel was fully resolved to annihilate their Order and seize their property, and that there was no hope of succor from the Pope, or any other power on earth broke the spirit of the gallant Templars. Even Jacques de Molay, the Grand Master, an heroic old man, was made to confess to crimes of which he never could have been guilty. He afterwards, however, retracted his confession, and, in the end, perished heroically at the stake. The particulars of the long history would occupy many hours in the recital, but the whole proceedings may be briefly characterized as a brutal mockery of the forms of justice. I refer you, for a more particular account, to the June (1869) number of the Nashville Masonic Record, where I have endeavored to follow the ins and outs of the trial. The grand execution took place on the 12th of May, 1310, when fifty-four of the Knights who had confessed on the rack, and then retracted all they had said in their dungeons, were burnt alive, as "relapsed heretics" in a field behind the Abbey of St. Antoine, at Paris. In sight of the flames that were to consume them, they were offered the king's pardon if they would again confess that they were guilty; but there was not one of them who would thus purchase life, and they all died singing a hymn of triumph, and protesting their innocence. Penal fires were lit in other parts of France, and all the surviving Knights who did not retract their plea of *not guilty*, were condemned to perpetual imprisonment.