

THE KNIGHTS TEMPLARS.

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THE chivalrous courage of the Knights-Templars, and the remote scenes in which it was displayed—the mixture in their singular order of the soldier and the priest—the mysterious accusations against them, the sudden destruction of their body when in apparent vigour, and the cruel fate of the Templar chiefs—possess the elements of romance in the highest degree; of which poets and novelists have not been slow to avail themselves. Popular literature has thus added a deeper interest to that which was in its own nature mysterious or romantic, but at the expense of accurate knowledge. A good history of the Knights-Templars is still a desideratum in literature! although a series of public documents and many contemporary historians, Greek, Latin and Oriental, furnish materials for a copious view of their character and career.

The order of the Templars originated in the commencement of the twelfth century; long before its close they had reached the acme of their reputation and power both of which immediately began to decline. After various vicissitudes of fortune, in which the ill predominated, Acre, the last of Christian fortresses in Palestine, was wrested from the military orders, in 1291. In 1308 Philip of France began his persecution of the Templars; and in 1312 their existence was formally abolished by the Pope.

The sudden rise and the sudden fall of the Templars are not an anomaly, but natural. At their first institution they were not only useful, but necessary. The "phrensy of the Crusades,"—or to speak more truly the eager awakening of the European mind, taking a religious direction on its first excited outbreak, poured myriads of pilgrims upon Palestine. But the Christian kingdom of Jerusalem was a nominal

kingdom; the bulk of the population was foreign; several strongholds of a strong country were in hostile hands, and the territory was surrounded by the armies of the Caliph, or the predatory hordes of the Bedouin. The establishment of an order was hailed with enthusiasm, which flattered the prejudices and promised to supply a pressing want of mankind, by undertaking the defence of the Temple and the Sepulchre, as well as the protection of the devotees who thronged to Jerusalem. But the Templars were not only useful by protecting from the Infidels the pilgrims who journeyed to the Holy Sepulchre, and that in the mode of a spiritual knight-errantry, or mounted police. It may be questioned whether the profoundest policy could have framed an institution better adapted to the occupation and defence of Palestine. The mass of surviving Crusaders never settled in the country; it was still possessed by the original inhabitants; so that no native force could have been raised for its defence. No secular power, much less the petty princes who remained in the Holy Land, could have raised a regular army from Europe. But this was easy to the Templars. The example of the Romish Church gave the corporation a received mode of acquiring immense wealth in every Christian country, the military character of the institution opened its ranks to the most fiery spirits, without depriving it of the gifts of the feeblest and most devout, celibacy secured its members from individual or family objects, and the vow of "obedience" was a means of discipline which no other army of that time could make the least approach to. Whilst the head quarters of the order were at Palestine, its different estates and establishments throughout Christendom were fiscal trea-