

Similar proscription and confiscation, but under more humane circumstances, overtook them in every corner of Europe. In Portugal alone was a shield thrown over them, and the persecution limited to a mere change in their title from the "Soldiers of the Temple," to the "Soldiers of Christ." In Arragon, they took refuge for a time in their fortresses, from whence they dictated a pressing remonstrance to the Pope, indignantly repelling the accusations brought against them, and imploring permission to maintain their innocence with their lances, according to the custom of knighthood and the times. This appeal, it need scarcely be said, was made in vain. James the Second of Arragon, in compliance with the Pontiff's instructions, stormed their strongholds; and, except in France, there was no country in Europe where the edict of extinction was more scrupulously obeyed.*

Vicious and unprincipled men may occasionally have found admission into the Order; but in so vast an association, it would have been much more surprising if every postulant had been strictly pious and virtuous. The recantation and dying testimony of Jacques de Molai reduce their confession on the rack and at the stake to futilities, subscribed to avert torture and death; and it is a fact not to be lightly passed over, that the major part of their admissions related to charges which were most improbable and preposterous. They admitted, for instance, that the devil, in the guise of a cat, assembled at their conclaves—which, unfortunately for them, as respected this investigation,

were held in secret, and by night; but no Templar confessed that he had abjured Christ, or sold the Holy Land. Their true crime, in the eyes of Philip, was their wealth; and the pretence and arrogance it engendered accelerated their downfall.

Could he have despoiled them of their possessions, without impugning their principles, not one helmed head would have fallen; but so puissant and venerated over Europe was the Order, that he knew the honey was not to be come at until he burned the bees out. Their fatal errors were lapsing into slothful and luxurious habits after the loss of the Holy Land, and indulging in ease in their European preceptories, while the Knights of St. John, their rivals in chivalrous enterprise, swept the Levant with their war galleys, and claimed the admiration of Europe, by their struggles to re-establish themselves in permanent sovereignty on the Asiatic coast. Had the Hospitalers also taken refuge in their cismarine Commanderies, one or the other of the rapacious monarchs of Christendom would have held it an equally laudable undertaking to effect their extirpation. The fierce zeal which had crowded Palestine with palmers and crusaders for so many years was quenched forever; and the Princes of the West were prepared to regard the military Orders as the broken tools of papal supremacy, which the father of the Christian world was imperatively called upon to throw away.

The persecution of the Templars, and the spoliation of their possessions, annihilated the Order as a political body; but its suppression as a confraternity was not entirely accomplished. Jacques de Molai, anticipating martyrdom, named a successor to the Grand Mastership, and the succession has been maintained regularly and uninterruptedly to the present day, as the archives of the Order, preserved at Paris, along with the seals, the standards and other

* None of the other military orders ever attained, in England, the same eminence as the Templars. They enjoyed immense estates in every province of that kingdom; and the Prior of London sat in Parliament as First Baron of the Realm. The number of Knights imprisoned in the British Isles, during the persecution, was about two hundred and fifty; and William de la More, the Grand Prior of England, maintained, with nearly as much dignity as Jacques de Molai, the innocence of his Order. The number of Knights Templar in Christendom, at the time of the dissolution of the Order, was about fifteen thousand.