Stydd Preceptory and the Military Religious Orders.[1]

By Rev. R. L. Farmer.

IN these days, when military ardour and discipline are mingled with religious devotion—in these modern days of Salvation Armies, Church Armies, Church Lads' Brigades, and Church Parades of Boy Scouts, it is quite opportune that the Council of our Society should have fallen in with the current trend of popular feeling, and should have brought us to the site of one of the very few houses in our county which once belonged to a religious society strongly imbued with the martial spirit.

And it is significant that our Secretary should have suggested that I should say a few words concerning what are termed the "Military Orders" generally, rather than confine myself to these particular remains at Stydd.

So, although standing here amid the ruins of a Preceptory of the brave Knights of St. John the Baptist of Jerusalem, my set purpose is not so much to conjecture the plan, appearance, and arrangement of the actual buildings as they once stood here, complete and furnished, but to recall to your minds the part played by those who once inhabited them, and those who held kindred establishments in the olden days of their activity.

The Military Orders were a kind of monastic institution developed during the period of the Crusades; their members took vows, had their Rule of life and formed a brotherhood. But, unlike all other religious fraternities, such as Monks, Canons Regular, and Friars, the Military Orders were armed, exercised in the arts of warfare, and prepared to defend their cause against the attacks of the infidel.

1 Read at the Annual Meeting, June 15th.

There were three of these Orders especially famous:—the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, later known as the Knights of Malta; the Knights Templar, and the Order of St. Lazarus.

The origin of these Orders may be traced to simple causes, namely, the frequent destitution of pilgrims to the Holy Land, the growing dangers to which pilgrims were exposed, and finally the attempt by Mohammedans to exclude all Christians from visiting those spots held by the latter as so dearly sacred. The necessary protection of the destitute, and the guarding of a right of way to the Holy City, led to the formation of the Military Orders.

Pilgrimages to Jerusalem had been constant from very early Christian times, even before the Empress Helena's "invention" (discovery) of the true Cross, which, of course, gave an impetus to such pious excursions. The forlorn distresses of pilgrims fallen sick had often moved the hearts of other compassionate travellers.

Somewhere about the middle of the eleventh century, permission was obtained from the Caliph of Egypt, by some merchants of Amalfi, to build a hospital at Jerusalem in which necessitous pilgrims might find succour.

The Hospital was dedicated to St. John the Baptist, and was on the traditional site of the dwelling in the "Upper Room" of which our Lord instituted the Last Supper. The Mohammedans then were at least tolerant to pilgrims, and the Hospital established in 1048 received benefactions from many wealthy Christians.

Unhappily there came a change of rulers. The Arab Mohammedans were dispossessed by the Turkish Mohammedans, who showed little consideration towards Christians, and subjected them to increasing persecutions.

It was proposed to the brothers who served the Hospital that they should form themselves into a more decided monastic body, taking the usual three-fold vow, and while continuing to dispense hospitality, also learn the practice of arms for purposes of defence. Pierre Gérard was appointed by Pope Pascal II. as the first Director. When Jerusalem was taken by the Crusaders

in 1099, and held for some brief fifty years, the Hospitallers were constituted Knights by Baldwin I. in 1104, and their Rule of St. Augustine was confirmed by Pope Pascal II. in 1113. From this time the Order rapidly spread throughout the Continent, houses were established, from which relays of knights constantly sallied to support their brethren in the Holy Land, and unstinted aid was sent.

The first house in London was founded about 1140, and the Order quickly increased throughout England, at a time when the crusading spirit pervaded the whole of the nobility. The Grand Prior of the Hospitallers in London became the first lay baron in England, and had a seat in the House of Peers. Before long there were forty-one establishments connected with the Order in England—some of which, however, were not large.

This preceptory at Stydd arose from a benefaction of Ralf Foun, son of Henry Foun, lord of Yeaveley, who in the reign of Richard I. (1189-1199) gave a hermitage at Yeaveley, with lands, water, woods, and a mill. He made, however, the fair stipulation that Richard, the then tenant, should continue his possession for life, and that Richard's son Robert should act as steward for the Hospitallers. He also stipulated that he himself, if he so desired it, in sickness or in health, should be received, clad in the habit of the Order, into the house. Other benefactions were added from time to time. It would seem that Ascuit Musard's gift, "to God and the blessed poor of the Hospital of St. John at Jerusalem" (made some time between 1162 and 1182), of half the rectory tithes of Staveley, was probably allocated by the Grand Priory to this preceptory. Amongst various donors, of course, we find the name of a Meynell (A.D. 1268).

I should imagine that the picturesque ivy-grown stonework of this outer chapel wall, with its two narrow single lancet windows, may well date back to the assigned period of the foundation, about A.D. 1200. The plain cylindrical font, narrowing towards the top, appears to be of the same ancient date.

This house at Stydd was rendered somewhat more important by the attachment to it of a smaller house or "commandery" at Barrow-on-Trent.

In the time of Henry II., Robert de Bakepuze gave the church and its lands at Barrow-on-Trent to the Knights Hospitallers. This gift was confirmed by John de Bakepuze in 1288 "for the souls of himself and his wife Cecilia, as well as for the souls of his ancestors and posterity."

Until about 1433 the commandery at Barrow was dependent only upon the head house in London, but then became affiliated to Stydd, and was placed under a bailiff who farmed its lands, continuing the customary hospitality, being accountable to the Preceptor of the joint house henceforward known as that of Yeaveley-*cum*-Barrow.

From that time the endowments at Barrow were for ever severed from the church there, for at the dissolution of the knights the Barrow lands went to enrich the Beaumonts and the Harpurs, and the vicarage of Barrow-on-Trent remains one of the poorest in the diocese.

The duties of the Preceptory here were two-fold: first to raise funds both from the profits of the lands and by reception of alms for the knights at Jerusalem, and secondly to dispense hospitality. There were in 1388 three resident members here: brother Henry de Bakewell, precentor and chaplain, brother Thomas of Bathelee, and John Brex, a *donatus*, that is, a layman who had devoted himself and his goods to the Order, and there were also certain servants. That they were not lax in entertaining strangers is shown by the amount of food consumed, namely, seventy-two quarters of wheat and eighty-four quarters of barley, besides other foods, in a year. You will notice the gravestone of one—presumably—member of the Order, with its incised long cross, with foliated head and foot, and, on the right side of the cross, a sword.

But to go back to the Order generally. Strange vicissitudes had followed its members abroad. The famous Saladin had brought about a union between the two opposite camps of Mohammedans, and appeared at the head of the opponents of Christendom.

The Crusaders in A.D. 1191 had been driven out of Jerusalem. The Knights of St. John—the last to leave the Holy Land,

STYDD PRECEPTORY.

Photo. by T. H. Thorpe.

after ransoming from the Saracens more than one thousand Crusaders—retreated to Acre, and thence to Cyprus. In 1308 they seized Rhodes Island, which they gallantly held until 1522, when finally in 1530 Malta was granted to them in fee by the Emperor Charles V., under the tender of one hawk and one falcon yearly to the Viceroy of Sicily. They were henceforth generally known as the Knights of Malta.

The ranks of the knights were recruited from each country in Europe. The Order was divided into eight "tongues" or nationalities, each under its own Grand Prior or "Pilier." Each "tongue" was subdivided into lesser commands, to hold one of which was equivalent to holding an ecclesiastical benefice. There were three recognised degrees of membership, (1) the Knights, who must be nobles; (2) the Chaplains; (3) the Serving-brothers, who must have been born of respectable parents who had never followed any handicraft.

The initiation of a knight was an imposing spectacle. Standing before the high altar in a long gown, without a girdle, as showing that he had taken no previous vows, the candidate was handed a sword. The girdle was then tied round his waist, in token of the acceptance of the Rule of the Order. Brandishing his sword around his head, he showed his readiness to fight, and drawing his sword, as though to cleanse it, under his arm, he vowed to keep it unsullied. Golden spurs placed upon his heels told of the speed with which he must fly to succour the needy. With lighted candle in his hand he stood throughout Mass, and this being ended the final oath was taken upon the Holy Missal.

The distinguishing dress of the Knights Hospitaller was a long, black pointed mantle with a peaked cape. The badge was the Maltese cross, with each arm ending in two points. There seems to be some concensus of tradition that the form of the badge was suggested by a flower native to Palestine, which some writers allude to as the *Lychnis Chalcedonica,* vulgarly known as scarlet lychnis, and which some assert was introduced into England by Crusaders. The flower is, in some districts, known as "scarlet lightning," and we are told that

our forefathers called it "Cross of Jerusalem," while Italians name it "Croce de Cavalière."

Other writers mention in this same connection different flowers of the same family, such as the "Ragged Robin" and the ordinary Pink Campion.

Now, it is quite true that in these flowers each petal has two points. But a certain amount of bewilderment creeps over one when botanical books are referred to and one learns that all the flowers in this Order have five petals, which seems to forbid the idea of a cross, and that the scarlet lychnis in particular is said to be a native of Russia. I may, however, quote from a letter received from an acknowledged expert to whom my difficulty was referred—the Rev. Alfred Thornley—who writes of the scarlet lychnis: "It is certainly a native of Russia, and it is true the flower has five petals, but they do unmistakably suggest a Maltese cross. Perhaps our mind does not readily realize the difference between eight points and ten points when the several flowers are seen together. The Germans call several species of Lychnis 'Maltesen Kreuz wegen der Schoënen Kreuzformigen Blüte,' and it would seem that the flower is so called from the cross." Yet he adds that he thinks it more probable that this form of the Maltese cross was derived from some other species of lychnis. I leave it to botanists to solve the difficulty. All that remains on this point for me to say is that the badge of our English army chaplains is a Maltese cross with eight points. The eight points, by the way, were held symbolic of the eight Beatitudes.

The second Military Order, that of the Knights Templar, I will pass over with brevity, notwithstanding the fact that they were a distinguished and powerful body, since none of their twenty-three English houses were situated in our county of Derby, although lands in various parishes were possessed by them.

A few French noblemen, about a score of years after the Hospitallers were founded, obtained from Baldwin II., King of Jerusalem, permission to found an Order with the title "Poor Soldiers of Christ," to aid and protect pilgrims and to

guard the site of Solomon's Temple. They were lodged within the temple walls, and hence were called Templars.

Special rules were drawn up for them by the good St. Bernard, and at first their austerities were very severe. Their white robe denoted purity, and the red cross which Pope Eugenius added put them in mind of the vow to spend their blood if necessary in the cause they had undertaken. Their black and white banner bore the words :—

"Non nobis Domine, non nobis, sed nomini tuo da gloriam."

What valour could exceed theirs? No challenge was to be declined, however great the odds. No quarter was to be asked. No ransom was to be paid. The Knights Commanders (milites) had in their community two inferior grades—serving-brothers (armigeri), who also bore arms, and clients (clientes), who managed the domestic arrangements.

Wonderfully attractive amongst the young nobility the Templars proved, and rich endowments fell to their Order. Alas! their possessions were their undoing. I do not say that the Templars were long popular, for apparently they grew over-bearing and autocratic. They had not the same duties towards the poor as the Knights Hospitallers, nor the same contact with suffering as the Order of St. Lazarus to soften character. But they did not deserve the tragic fate which annihilated them. The King of France desired their possessions, and by means of excruciating tortures, so-called confessions were extracted from some of the members, inculpating the whole Order in hideous crimes. On the very face these charges are too extravagant for acceptance.

Edward II., son-in-law of Philippe-le-Bel, was induced to take action against the Templars in England, and did so with great severity, but nothing approaching the cruelty of the French King. The Order was suppressed in England in 1312. Its members were confined to the precincts of other religious communities, and their estates were handed over to the Knights Hospitallers.

The last Grand Master of the Templars, Jacques de Molay, was burnt at the stake in France in 1313.

The headquarters in England was the Temple in Fleet Street, with its "round church" representing the holy sepulchre, the nave of which was consecrated by the Patriarch Heraclius of Jerusalem in 1185. The church passed to the Hospitallers, the neighbouring buildings were let to law students at £10 per annum. The cross-legged effigies of knights within the Temple Church are doubtless familiar to many of you. There is a common belief that all cross-legged armoured figures, wherever found, are those of Crusaders. There is amongst archæological scientists a cult of "higher criticism" which undermines all old beliefs, and we must accept the conclusion that some knights whose legs are crossed never left England, and some were born after the Crusades were over! The posture is unknown on the Continent amongst all the effigies of Crusaders. In fact, we are told it is "a peculiarly English motive, introduced about the middle of the thirteenth century . . . a natural attitude of repose in life, in which state these figures generally appear, usually with open eyes, and sometimes in the act of sheathing the sword." It was apparently the introduction of plate-armour which debarred the sculptor from continuing to make the cross-leg the distinctive English symbol of graceful repose.

The third Military Order was that of St. Lazarus, originally a community of men devoted to the care of lepers, but forming themselves into a fighting as well as a nursing fraternity at the beginning of the twelfth century. The Order was composed both of those tainted with the disease and of those who were sound. The former, and some of the self-sacrificing latter, performed the duties of the lazar-house, and themselves followed the rule of Augustine. The warrior members joined the ranks of Crusaders, charging themselves especially with the duty of protecting the leper-houses. Leprosy spread continuously. Pilgrims and Crusaders alike fell its victims and sought the shelter of the hospital. About 1250 the headquarters of the Order were moved from Palestine to France, and a large lazar-house outside Paris was established. The head of the Order of St. Lazarus was always himself a leper. Leprosy was

supposed to have been carried from Egypt to the Holy Land by the Jews, and from thence to have spread over Europe. It was terribly common in England, and there were nearly one hundred lazar-houses here in the thirteenth century.

The principal Hospital in England was at Burton-Lazars, Leicestershire, to which William de Ferrars, about 1180, granted the church at Spondon, to which gift grants of land at Borrowash, Chaddesden, etc., were added.

There was a lazar-house for women at Alkmonton, in Longford parish. At Chesterfield there was a house dedicated to St. Leonard, and at Derby, about A.D. 1200, was a house, then outside the town wall, on what is now Leonard Street.

At Locko there was a preceptory dedicated to St. Mary Magdalene which owed direct allegiance to the mother-house at Paris. This being the case, it was regarded as an alien house during the fourteenth century French wars, and in 1347 Edward III. granted the £20 a year forfeited to the Crown to the warden and scholars of the newly founded King's Hall, Cambridge.

The derivation of Locko is usually referred to "loques," an obsolete French word meaning "rags." I remember some twenty years ago walking with a working man through an allotment field near Spondon, and his telling me that it was called the "Lousy Field," because lepers had been buried there. From this, I presume, there was a separate burial-ground.

Lepers were not allowed to wander about nor to attend markets or parish churches. By an order of Edward I. "such persons shall have a common attorney for themselves to go each Sunday to the parish church to collect alms for their sustenance."

Nevertheless, although we may grant that low-side chancel windows were used by friars for the purpose of hearing "outside confessions," yet the peculiar opening at Spondon church (may we be allowed to believe?) was likely resorted to by those inmates from Locko—nursing brothers and perhaps even lepers—when desirous of viewing or receiving the Holy Sacrament.

Let me close this small sketch of the Military Orders with these words:—

"Other knights courted adventure for the sake of their honour and the lady of their love; these incurred it in order to help the unfortunate and to assist the poor." The Grand Master of the Knights Hospitallers was proud of the title, "Guardian of the Redeemer's Poor"; he of St. Lazarus was of necessity always a leper, while the Knights Companions termed the poor "our masters."

Stydd Font.

Photo. by the Bishop of Derby.