XXVII.

KNIGHT COMMANDER OF THE TEMPLE.

This is the first of the really Chivalric Degrees of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite. It occupies this place in the Calendar of the Degrees between the 26th and the last of the Philosophical Degrees, in order, by breaking the continuity of these, to relieve what might otherwise become wearisome; and also to remind you that, while engaged with the speculations and abstractions of philosophy and creeds, the Mason is also to continue engaged in the active duties of this great warfare of life. He is not only a Moral-ist and Philosopher, but a Soldier, the Successor of those Knights of the Middle Age, who, while they wore the Cross, also wielded the Sword, and were the Soldiers of Honor, Loyalty, and Duty.

Times change, and circumstances; but Virtue and Duty remain the same. The Evils to be warred against but take another shape, and are developed in a different form.

There is the same need now of truth and loyalty as in the days of Frederic Barbarossa.

The characters, religious and military, attention to the sick and wounded in the Hospital, and war against the Infidel in the field, are no longer blended; but the same duties, to be performed in another shape, continue to exist and to environ us all.

The innocent virgin is no longer at the mercy of the brutal Baron or licentious man-at-arms; but purity and innocence still need protectors.

War is no longer the apparently natural State of Society; and for most men it is an empty obligation to assume, that they will not recede before the enemy; but the same high duty and obligation still rest upon all men.

Truth, in act, profession, and opinion, is rarer now than in the days of chivalry. Falsehood has become a current coin, and circulates with a certain degree of respectability; because it has an actual value. It is indeed the great Vice of the Age—it, and its twin-sister, Dishonesty. Men, for political preferment, profess
whatever principles are expedient and profitable. At the bar, in
the pulpit, and in the halls of legislation, men argue against their
own convictions, and, with what they term logic, prove to the
satisfaction of others that which they do not themselves believe.
Insincerity and duplicity are valuable to their possessors, like
estates in stocks, that yield a certain revenue: and it is no longer
the truth of an opinion or a principle, but the net profit that may
be realized from it, which is the measure of its value.

The Press is the great sower of falsehood. To slander a political
antagonist, to misrepresent all that he says, and, if that be impos-
sible, to invent for him what he does not say; to put in circu-
lation whatever baseless calumnies against him are necessary to
defeat him,—these are habits so common as to have ceased to
excite notice or comment, much less surprise or disgust.

There was a time when a Knight would die rather than utter a
lie, or break his Knightly word. The Knight Commander of the
Temple revives the old Knightly spirit; and devotes himself to
the old Knightly worship of Truth. No profession of an opinion
not his own, for expediency’s sake or profit, or through fear of the
world’s disfavor; no slander of even an enemy; no coloring or
perversion of the sayings or acts of other men; no insincere
speech and argument for any purpose, or under any pretext, must
soil his fair escutcheon. Out of the Chapter, as well as in it, he
must speak the Truth, and all the Truth, no more and no less; or
else speak not at all.

To purity and innocence everywhere, the Knight Commander
owes protection, as of old; against bold violence, or those, more
guilty than murderers, who by art and treachery seek to slay the
soul; and against that want and destitution that drive too many
to sell their honor and innocence for food.

In no age of the world has man had better opportunity than
now to display those lofty virtues and that noble heroism that so
distinguished the three great military and religious Orders, in
their youth, before they became corrupt and vitiated by prosperity
and power.

When a fearful epidemic ravages a city, and death is inhaled
with the air men breathe; when the living scarcely suffice to bury
the dead,—most men flee in abject terror, to return and live, re-
spectable and influential, when the danger has passed away. But
the old Knightly spirit of devotion and disinterestedness and con-
tempt of death still lives, and is not extinct in the human heart. Everywhere a few are found to stand firmly and unflinchingly at their posts, to front and defy the danger, not for money, or to be honored for it, or to protect their own household; but from mere humanity, and to obey the unerring dictates of duty. They nurse the sick, breathing the pestilential atmosphere of the hospital. They explore the abodes of want and misery. With the gentleness of woman, they soften the pains of the dying, and feed the lamp of life in the convalescent. They perform the last sad offices to the dead; and they seek no other reward than the approval of their own consciences.

These are the true Knights of the present age: these, and the captain who remains at his post on board his shattered ship until the last boat, loaded to the water’s edge with passengers and crew, has parted from her side; and then goes calmly down with her into the mysterious depths of the ocean:—the pilot who stands at the wheel while the swift flames eddy round him and scorch away his life:—the fireman who ascends the blazing walls, and plunges amid the flames to save the property or lives of those who have upon him no claim by tie of blood, or friendship, or even of ordinary acquaintance:—these, and others like these:—all men, who, set at the post of duty, stand there manfully; to die, if need be, but not to desert their post: for these, too, are sworn not to recede before the enemy.

To the performance of duties and of acts of heroism like these, you have devoted yourself, my Brother, by becoming a Knight Commander of the Temple. Soldier of the Truth and of Loyalty! Protector of Purity and Innocence! Defender of Plague and Pestilence! Nurser of the Sick and Burier of the Dead! Knight, preferring Death to abandonment of the Post of Duty! Welcome to the bosom of this Order!