

I N T R O D U C T O R Y

Some would say that it was a strange story, founded on historical fact blended with later elements of fiction. It must be admitted that some things are not capable of proof, but that does not automatically brand them as false. Much has not been adequately recorded, or has been lost (as in the time of the French Revolution and subsequently). This accounts for interruptions in the narrative.

There is no doubt about St. Louis, King of France, as an historical person. His reign, his redeeming of the Crown of Thorns, the building of the Ste Chapelle in Paris and his part in the 7th and 8th Crusades are all well attested. If the Order of the Crown of Thorns can trace its origin back to those events, it has been built upon a sure foundation. Perhaps we shall never be able to answer this with absolute certainty, since reputable reference books on Chivalric Orders do not mention it. A select Order of knights honouring the Crown of Christ would be truly in keeping with the character of St. Louis.

Certainly the Instruments of the Passion (known as the "Arma Christi") had a highly significant place in the King's devotional life, linked always with Jerusalem, from whence they originally came and Paris, where so many of these relics were then enshrined. If we can think of St. Louis' life as polarised, it was between these two cities. In art he is uniquely shown holding the Crown of Thorns, commemorating the solemn procession in 1239 from Sens through the forest of Vincennes to Paris; the King and his brother Robert, Count of Artois, barefoot and clad in tunics of plain white wool, carried on their shoulders the coffer which contained the relic.

We know that St. Louis gave away some individual thorns from the Crown to worthy recipients, for instance to the King of Norway, but this did not constitute them as members of an Order of knights. The Order of the Crown of Thorns may well have been conceived as a body-guard to watch over the precious treasures of the Ste Chapelle, an elite spiritual chivalry. In a certain sense the present (re-established) Order has that same ideal.

What follows is in the nature of an official document, compiled by one who was well qualified to do so, a former Grand Master who did much for the Order in the U.S.A. and who deserves to be remembered.

G.F.T.

A BRIEF RESUME OF THE HISTORY OF THE ORDERS OF SAN LUIGI
Prepared from the Private Archives of the Orders and revised in 1953-4
by H.S.H. The Most Reverend Prince Edmond de San Luigi, Grand Master.

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The history of the Order of the Crown of Thorns is painfully lacking in detail, not least because the circumstances surrounding the death of the Grand Master - H.S.H. Prince Joseph III - were such that the historical documents in his possession were destroyed, or were at least held back, and the delivery of the same to His Successor according to his instructions was refused, even diplomatic intervention proving useless. Also at one time the Grand Master had a fire which caused serious loss, and while Msgr. Edmond did see most, if not all, of the documents in question, that was more than 30 years ago now (1953), and faint recollections are of little or no value in such a matter.

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As the name of this Order indicates its brief history is closely connected with the precious Relic of the Crown of Thorns. Saint Paulinus of Nola (409) mentions "the thorns with which our Lord was crowned" as being in Jerusalem at that time. From Antonius of Placenna we learn that in the 6th century it rested in the Church of Mt. Sion. Next, the eminent historian M. de Mely asserts that the complete Crown of Thorns was transferred to Byzantium about 1063. In 1238 Baldwin II, Latin Emperor of Constantinople, offered the Crown of Thorns to St. Louis, King of France. It was then actually in the hands of the Venetians as security for a large loan, but it was redeemed and brought to France with great solemnity in August 1239. As a worthy resting place the saintly King built the magnificent Sainte Chapelle and dedicated it on April 25, 1246, under the title of Sainte Couronne d'Epines de Notre Seigneur. Up to the time of the Revolution these Relics of the Sacred Passion were kept in the Sainte Chapelle in a magnificent reliquary installed beneath a Gothic canopy, all being protected by ten different locks, the keys for which were kept by the King until about 1656. Every year upon Good Friday, during extra-ordinary solemnities, the King of France went to the Sainte Chapelle and opened up the Holy Reliquary, and the Relics were offered for the veneration of the faithful. In 1793 nearly all the shrines in the churches and chapels of Paris were destroyed, and their contents sent for temporary keeping amongst the Fine Arts. But in 1794 the chief ones, and the Crown of Thorns in particular, were entrusted to the National Library. This continued until October 26, 1804, when, upon the demand of Cardinal de Balloy, Archbishop of Paris, the Holy Crown of Thorns was taken into the care of l'Abbe Destres, Grand Vicair of the Cathedral Church of Notre Dame, and there it remained.

The 700th Anniversary of the arrival of the Crown of Thorns was celebrated with great solemnity in July, 1939. During the great war the Holy Relic was moved for safety to a monastery in the South of France, being returned to Paris about July, 1941. We have no record as to what transpired during the second great war, but assume that it is now in the Sainte Chapelle once more.

It might be noted that tradition states that a first small portion of the precious Relic was brought to Europe by St. Germain, Bishop of Paris, about the 6th century, being long preserved at St. Germain-des-Pres, the oldest church in Paris.

The Thorns themselves are said to have been mostly distributed to other churches and chapels, with St. Louis himself beginning that distribution, the remaining parts being left in the Sainte Chapelle.

There is no reliable tradition as to the actual date of the formation of the Order of the Crown of Thorns, but it is known that he wished to preserve the memory of its Translation by giving to his Barons a souvenir or representation of the famous Relic, and traditionally he is venerated as the initiator and creator of the Order. Tradition has preserved for us that Philippe-le-Bel, grandson of St. Louis, really laid the solid foundation of the Order in direct opposition to the Order of Templars, which Order he destroyed, either under the pretext of its crying abuses, or in order to confiscate the immense possessions of that Order, the power of which had given him deep concern. He is generally accepted as the first authentic Grand Master of the Order of the Crown of Thorns. Unfortunately a list of the Grand Masters has not been found as yet, and such records as may have been held by the restored Order were lost as stated above. Only it has been learned that it was one of the Orders ordered discontinued during the troublous days in France, but there is no doubt that an underground organisation continued right along, as with other French Orders - at least one of which the present Grand Master has belonged to for years.

During the latter half of the 19th century the learned Doctor Fercken, a professor of Oriental Languages and presumably a Chevalier of the informal organisation of the Order, believing that time had come once more for its formal organisation, prepared a set of Statutes which he submitted to the Patriarch of Antioch for approval. Somewhere around the year 1880, His Holiness Maran Mar Ignatius Peter III agreed to sanction the re-establishment of open existence, and declared it to be his will that the Order of the Crown of Thorns should be, for all those who should be judged worthy of it, a bodyguard of honour for the defence of the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, both in the Orient and in the Occident.

In 1892 the Patriarch Ignatius Peter III, Successor of St. Peter, sent for His Eminence Mar Timotheus, who had been created Metropolitan Archbishop for work amongst the Orthodox Catholics in America by Julius I, Archbishop of the Syrian Church in Ceylon, in accordance with the Bull issued by the Patriarch, and conferred upon him the rank of Grand Master of the Order, entrusting to him the regulations as then provided. The standard of the Order is a banner of silk, half white with the fleur-de-lys, half red bearing the Crown of Thorns with the monogram of Christ in the centre.

Meanwhile history tells us how a band of Portugese missionaries of high degree founded the Abbey of San Luigi on St. Louis' Day, August 25th, 1883, on the frontier land of the Touaregs-Asgar Country. The colony by its constitution was independent, and was known as the Principality of San Luigi, the Rev. Fr. Henrico Pacomez being elected that same month as the first Prince of San Luigi. He died February 10, 1884 and was succeeded by Prince Joseph I, who was killed

in August of that same year during a massacre of the inhabitants by the Touaregs. The survivors travelled through Northern Africa and Egypt to the Unyoro Kingdom, on the shores of Lake Albert-Nyanza. By permission of Kabarega I, king of that country, they founded a new Principality and Abbey of San Luigi under the direction of Dom Jose, who received from the king the title of Prince-Governor, thus becoming the third Prince of San Luigi in 1885, under the title of Prince Joseph II.

A few years later an epidemic of tropical fever almost wiped out the colonists, forced the closing of the Abbey and a return to Europe, where in 1897 a Prince Louis succeeded to the title and rights. An Order of the Crown of Thorns, as also an Order of the Lion and Black Cross, had been organized by decree of the first Prince of San Luigi on October 15, 1883, without any knowledge that the old Order had already been re-established by authority of the Patriarch. Under the French laws the Chevaliers of the Order of the Crown of Thorns had been legally established, but when this dual existence was discovered negotiations were undertaken for the bringing together of both re-establishments under one Head, and in 1899 the priority and legitimacy of the Order under the Grand Master Mar Timotheus I was established, and he became the fifth Prince of San Luigi as Prince Joseph III. After his death in 1929 this union of the two branches of the Order of the Crown of Thorns, and the Grand Mastership of Prince Joseph III over the Order of the Lion and Black Cross was denied by some elements, it being claimed that the 1899 negotiations were never completed, because they were based upon the submission of Mar Timotheus I to the Holy See, and that as that submission was never completed the plans concerning the two Orders were abandoned. Unfortunately for the supporters of this story, the fact that Joseph III was fully recognised as the Prince-Grand Master of both Orders was established by the existence in the Archives of the Orders of one or two Brevets of the Principaute de San Luigi in which he is thus described, one bearing date October 25, 1903 - some four years after the negotiations were said to have fallen through - , conferring the Rank of Chevalier in the Order of the Lion and Black Cross and bearing the signature of the one making the false claim as the Secretary of H. S. H. Mar Timotheus I. Further evidence exists in the constant use by Prince Joseph III of the San Luigi Seal as appearing upon that same Brevet. And indeed this traducer later sought to have his knighthood in the united Order of the Crown of Thorns confirmed by the Successor to Prince Joseph III. Hence, we may reasonably assume that this was but one of several attempts made to discredit the Orders of which H. S. H. was Grand Master up to the time of his death, July 1, 1929.

Apart from a copy of a French Brochure published in Paris in 1900, containing the Statutes of the Order as then in force, no record remains in existence of the work of either Order up to around 1918-20 - apart from rumours that H. S. H. had made a number of unwise admissions and had conferred Titles of Nobility upon unsuitable people. During that period (1918-20) H. S. H. consulted with Msgr. Edmond, an intimate friend who held high rank in the Order of the Crown of Thorns, as well as in other Orders of Knighthood, and about 1920 it was agreed that he would serve in the capacity of Grand Chancellor with the dignity of Archimandrite and Monsignor. Between 1918 and 1925 Msgr. Edmond was admitted to various Ranks and Titles in both of the San Luigi Orders, the exact dates being unknown as no Brevets were available until about 1923, everything of that nature being verbal until later recorded upon Brevets as

of various dates. During 1922 a Brochure was produced in English, largely along the same lines as the French Brochure of 1900, and the new Grand Chancellor proceeded to try to develop the Order on sound lines, under the direction of the Grand Master, through contacts he was able to make amongst those of high standing in Europe. But it was found that little progress could be made, save on a very small scale and mostly in the U.S.A., the reasons for this difficulty not being fully revealed until after the death of H.S.H.

On May 25, 1923, the Grand Master appointed Msgr. Edmond as His Successor to the Office, by legal document duly signed and sealed, and sworn to before a Notary Public, prior to his departure for the land of his birth - France.

Amongst other things, this document states:- "...This is my formal acknowledgment that...has been admitted a Prince of the Order, and has been raised to the dignity of Archimandrite and Monsignor. Further, be it noted that it is my will to appoint...as my Successor to the Office of Grand Master of the Order... at my death. This is his authority to assume that Office, and to those who may have possession of any of my effects to assume that Office, and to those who may have papers, insignia, seals, diplomas, documents and letters, and any other properties which may be at that time in my possession, or may have been lent by me to another for any purpose, relating to this Order...Be it further noted that I, Mar Timotheus I, reserve to myself the right to cancel this appointment of a Successor to the Office of Grand Master, and to appoint any other whom I may choose, at any time prior to my decease, due notice being given..of my intention so to do...To the Office of Grand Master is secured all the privileges as are, or may be, set forth in the publications of the Order, including that of admitting to the various degrees and titles connected with the Order, and to make any provision that may be necessary for the continuance of the Order."

Upon the death of H.Em. Mar Timotheus I - His Serene Highness Prince Joseph de San Luigi - at Versailles, France, on July 1, 1929, Msgr. Edmond succeeded him as the sixth Prince de San Luigi, he taking also the title of Prince-Abbot in the hope that eventually it might prove possible to re-establish complete existence of the Abbey of San Luigi. Efforts were made to obtain the various documents, vestments, &c. referred to in the Appointment, nearly all of which Msgr. Edmond had seen in America, through the services of the American Consulate in Paris, but the Consulate Officials were unable to obtain any trace of them, and it soon became evident that antagonistic elements had seized them, with the intention of hindering the carrying out of the instructions outlined above. At last it was learned that a Senor Panchaud of Mexico City was the legal heir of H.S.H., and after some correspondence a letter was received from him by Msgr. Edmond, dated June 14, 1930, containing the following sentence:- "I am in receipt of yours dated the 27th of May, and I recognise that you are the heir of the Ordre Chevaleresque et Religieux de la Couronne d'Epines." This was of real importance, as it removed any possibility of legal quibbles later on, being a direct acknowledgement of the Succession of Msgr. Edmond to the Grand Mastership by the legal heir of the deceased Grand Master.

With these items as the chief background for the future of the Order, with the names of less than 50 Knights of the Order, it became necessary to determine future policies. It was not long before it became evident that the Order was in very bad repute, and was quite unrecognised in Chivalric circles. Possibly

some part of this situation arose from the failure of the negotiations for the submission of Mar Timotheus I to the Holy See, referred to above. In conjunction with that, deep as the attachment between the old and new Grand Masters had been, it would be foolish to ignore the fact that Joseph III was a Frenchman of very humble origin, quite unsuited by European standards to bear the Title of Prince, obviously quite ignorant of the methods necessary to establish an Order of Knighthood, very unwise in his tendency to confer Titles of Nobility upon independent Principality and from the Patriarch -- as well as himself having been subject to unpleasant rumours of one sort and another -- for which no proper foundation could be discovered, so that Msgr. Edmond looked upon them as unfortunate rumours instigated by malice on the part of some enemy or enemies.

Fortunately Msgr. Edmond possessed hereditary nobility, was somewhat familiar with Orders of Knighthood and already held high rank in some. So after some consultations he decided to begin steps which he hoped would lead to the recognition of the Order, as also to bring the Order of the Lion and Black Cross out of the obscurity into which it had drifted, thus restoring both of the San Luigi Orders to life and good reputation.

The next six years saw good progress, with around 200 new Knights enrolled, and a brief new Bulletin of Regulations for the Orders published in 1934, in which necessary changes were made, to bring them more into accord with normal customs. Special mention should be made of the co-operation accorded by the Marquis de Quesnel, the Duke d'Allery de Bourbon (a member of the Camerier Secret of the Pope); the Duke de Saint-Simon; Baron Woldemar de Barkow (Representative of H. I. H. the Grand Duke Kyrill in America) and H. H. Prince Henri (an Official of one of the Jacobite Pretenders, as also of one of the Habsburg Pretenders), who served as Grand Chancellor for several years.

It was suggested that possibly relations could be resumed with the Antioch Patriarchate which had been responsible for the re-establishment of the Order, but a new Patriarch was in power whose attitude was unfriendly, probably because of the late Grand Master's final submission to Rome, and possibly in part influenced by "political" considerations in another direction.

But in spite of rebuffs and the springing up of "claimants" here and there, progress continued. Officials were appointed, for ex. in Gt. Britain, Holland, Sweden, France, Italy, India, Poland, Belgium, Palestine, Cuba, Puerto Rico and Estonia, and recognition began to be shown in various directions. The Maharajah of Jaypore became a Patron of le Grand Prix Humanitaire and of the Order of the Lion and Black Cross, while the British Government in India consented to the promulgation of the Orders there and the wearing of the Insignia. H. R. H. Prince Pawel Zabawca Piast-Riedelski of Poland extended his Patronage; Claimants of Jacobite and Habsburg lines extended recognition by formal documents. The Coat-of-Arms registered in the name of Msgr. Edmond in 1923, as a preliminary to his assuming the Office of Grand Master when necessary, was submitted for proper Heraldic Registration to the Polish Heraldic College at Warsaw, and was so "preserved in the Library of the Acts of the Armorial General of Knighthood and of the Nobility of the Crown of Poland, and of the Grand Duchies of Lithuania and of Ruthenie.." Registration was made also in the American Heraldry Society, with honorary Life Membership accorded by the American Heraldic Society. Msgr. Edmond was Membership was accorded also by a French Heraldic College. Msgr. Edmond was

admitted as an honorary member of the Pontifical Accademia Tiberina, a Foundation under the Patronage of H.H. Leo XII. Holding the Cross of the Imperial Russian Order of St. Stanislas, Commandeur with Plaque "for foreigners", dated February 22, 1922, He was admitted to the 1st class of that Order - Grand Croix - in 1936, as also a membre d'honneur of the Association Patriotique Russe au nom de l'Empereur Nicholas II, first in the Section Generale and then in the Section Armees Imperiales. The year previous He had been admitted to the Order St. Wladimir de Kieff as Commandeur avec la plaque, ayant la supreme sanction, sur le ruban des Romanoff du premiere classe. This Order was under the high protection of King Alexander of Serbia and had the supreme approval of the de jure Emperor Kyrill of Russia. In 1936 also He was admitted through the Russian Veterans Society of the World War as an Hereditary Knight with Cross of the Order of the Compassionate Heart, and was granted the Medal "pour zele et assistance" on ribbon of the Order of St. Andrew, 1st class, in gold, by order of H.I.M. the de jure Emperor Kyrill I of Russia. By the French Legitimist claimist He was admitted to the Orders of St. Michael and du Lys. A little later He was admitted to the Orders of La Chevalrie, and the members of the two San Luigi Orders were accorded the privilege of admittance when so desired. This Association was composed only of fully recognised Orders.

In 1938 H. S. H. Msgr. Edmond was admitted to the highest rank in the Order of the Golden Griffon of Gotenburg and the Key of Kalmar of Sweden, and to the Genealogical and Heraldic Society in relation. It might be noted that Hiram Ulysses Grant, when President of the U.S.A., was admitted to this same Order on the occasion of a visit to Sweden. Gothstad was the seat of this Order, and there was founded an Association of recognised Catholic Orders, including that of St. Lazare, San Juan Bautiste de Puerto Rico, the Crown of Charlemagne, St. Wladimir (in all of which Msgr. Edmond held Knighthood), &c., and to this Association the San Luigi Orders were admitted with Gothstad erected as an Hereditary Grand Priory of the Orders.

Rumours being circulated that the Order of the Crown of Thorns had been disbanded upon the death of Prince Joseph III, a Declaration was signed by various Ecclesiastics, Knights of the Order, contradicting such rumours and asserting its continuous existence openly from the time of the Patriarch authorising it.

The History of the Crown of Thorns Order was included in the Swedish publication "Commilitones Christi II", also in the Italian "La Nobilta della Stirpe", as written by the Marchese Colocci-Vespucchi of the Heraldic College at Rome, and in the "Herold", organ of the Heraldic College at Warsaw, Poland.

In America the Order used a Chapel in California for several years as the temporary Abbey of St. Louis, first informally, and then on Sunday August 26, 1939, formally dedicated as The Abbey, by Prince Edmond.

An American Charter was obtained in Colorado in 1935 in the name of "The American Chapter of the Seminary and Orders of l'Ancienne Abbaye-Principaute de San Luigi", conferring extensive Rights and Powers, including the Right to confer all customary degrees through the Seminary as a Department of the Orders, and all Chivalric and Noblesse Titles and Ranks through the Orders, together with the Right to own property. Thus all of the ancient Rights of the former Principality and of the Orders are now protected as fully as possible under American laws. The Colorado Charter was filed at Sacramento, California, in 1946, through the good offices

of a federal attorney - Dr. Henry J. Kleefisch - the Californian Office being set up in charge of the Chapter Secretary, Dr. Philip J. Beyhan. Upon his death in March, 1952, the Rt. Rev. Count M.H. l'Estrange took charge at 13191 Foothill Blvd., R. 1, Santa Ana, California.

The years between 1939 and 1954 saw a variety of changes take place. Indeed both of the Great Wars seriously interfered with the progress of the Orders, and while many deaths of the Chevaliers were reported, there is still considerable doubt concerning a number. Yet in spite of many problems, the attacks of enemies seeking to disrupt the organization, necessary changes in personnel, &c. 1954 sees the Orders making steady progress, while the number of Chevaliers which was less than 50 when Prince Edmond became Grand Master in 1929 has grown to somewhere between 800 and 1000, living and departed, and may be even greater as no detailed count has been made.

The Office of Grand Chancellor is very important, and the necessary changes have been too many for effective work, and at times Prince Edmond has had to take over that extra work until a suitable candidate appeared. The Grand Chancellors have included Prince Henri Baron de Barkow, Alan Hazelton, Baron de Benedict and now the Comte l'Estrange.

Through the wide associations of the Grand Master Who took Office on July 1, 1929, and with the hearty co-operation of many friends in various countries, full recognition was obtained in 1938 or 1939, as shown, for example, by the many Brevets that were conferred upon Him as the Prince de San Luigi and/or as Grand Master of the San Luigi Orders, which actually involved recognition of His Status and of the Orders in Russia, Poland, Italy, France, India, South and Central America, Spain, Portugal, &c. by those who had the proper authority and standing to accord recognition. No attempt has been made to list the various Titles and Dignities conferred upon Him by Universities, Colleges, learned and philanthropic Societies of various kinds, and Orders in large numbers. All of which, to Him, were valuable only as they brought honour to the San Luigi Orders.

While at this moment it has not proved possible to erect a permanent Abbey of St. Louis, we all look forward to the time when such will become possible. Perhaps not during the time of the present Grand Master, for He is no longer "young", but surely in God's good time. Meanwhile a good many properties have been given or promised for the use of the future Abbey, including a very beautiful and valuable Chalice and Paten, Vestments in considerable number, including some of historical interest, &c.

In accordance with the Regulations of the Order, a Successor has been provided for, in the person of the Rt. Rev. Count M.H. l'Estrange, subject to change by the present Grand Master, should occasion require.

It might be noted that the Right to confer Nobility Titles has been exercised with much conservatism, contrary to the custom of other Orders and de jure Rulers, as we all are inclined to the old traditions in such matters, indeed none at all were conferred from 1936 to 1951. Several have been promised in commemoration of the 25th year of Prince Edmond's Grand Mastership, and after those have been formally granted, restrictions will probably be in force once more.