

ITEMS FOR MASONIC LODGE BULLETINS

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(Research Pamphlet No. 15)

These brief paragraphs on various phases of Masonry are designed for use primarily in monthly bulletins issued by Masonic Lodges, to serve as suggestions for study.

The Research Committee believes that they may also prove of help to those who seek suggestions for subjects on which to prepare lodge lectures.

The paragraphs were collected in this way in response to increasing demands for them from lodge officers.

January 15, 1922

TRADITION

In Freemasonry, written history began by reducing tradition to historical narrative, and for many years legends were accepted without evidence. But with the critical school of historians the purely traditional was separated from the evident historical. Traditions are never invented, although often exaggerated, and much elaborated through successive generations. Tradition, however, has a foundation in fact, and is valuable for the preservation of knowledge which might otherwise be lost.

THE MASON S CHARACTER

Freemasonry has always been true to its name, and the real Mason is the builder of the temple of his own character. Its mission is to furnish high ideals for the individual, that may be reflected in his actions towards his fellow men. The Masonic ideal teaches that moral and spiritual attainments are far more important than the material and physical.

AN ANCIENT DOCUMENT

In tracing the genealogy of Freemasonry we eventually arrive at the date 1390 A.D., when the Regius manuscript, the oldest known and most important version of the Old Charges, is supposed to have been written. Traditions lead back to the creation of the world, and include most of the great teachers of mankind as Masons; but to those who insist upon applying the approved methods of historical research to the study of Freemasonry, the Regius Manuscript affords a starting point in cumulative documentary evidence relative to the direct ancestry of the fraternity. The Regius Manuscript, as it is known, is a poem written on sixty-four pages of vellum, handsomely bound. It was presented to the British museum by King George II, in 1757. It was at first catalogued as a poem of Moral Duties, and this may have caused its tardy discovery in 1839 as a Masonic document.

A SPUR TO STUDY

The question of what is Freemasonry is one for individual interpretation, and calls forth earnest endeavor to construe the lessons taught in each degree. The question of whence it originated must necessarily be answered by facts, and as such are limited, it cannot be fully answered until more historical truths have been recovered. The various theories which have been advanced in regard to its probable origin are of value as they induce the student to verify the data on which they are founded, so as to maintain an intelligent theory of his own.

ONE VERSION OF FREEMASONRY

After the Norman conquest, England was invaded by a perfect army of ecclesiastics; and churches, monasteries, cathedrals and abbeys were commenced in every part of the country. Where these buildings were being erected in towns the work could be undertaken by the local guild, but when they were far from the populous places a difficulty as experienced in procuring sufficient skilled labor. To meet this, it is supposed that many experienced members of the guilds were induced to sever their connection with the local body and accept service under the new ecclesiastical authority, thus becoming free from the restrictions and limitations to which they had previously been subject, and henceforth being designated Freemasons.

The church building Freemasons, being a national organization whose members travelled throughout the length and breadth of the land, wherever employment was obtainable, oftentimes found it impracticable to refer to their late employers for their character and qualifications. Hence arose the necessity for sign, token and word, with which our ancient brethren went to and fro. Whence came this sign, token and word? We do not know. We read of an assembly at York, 926 A.D., of which, however, no record remains. But there must have been a meeting held somewhere, at which regulations were adopted, which served to bind the brotherhood together for many generations (John A. Thorp, P.A. Gr. D.E., England).

THE 1723 CONSTITUTION

In 1723 Brother James Anderson's Constitutions of the Freemasons appeared. It was purported to have been compiled from old Manuscripts and Records, many of which have doubtless been lost. Brother R.F. Gould calls attention to three striking innovations in the 1723 Constitutions, to-wit: It discards Christianity as the (only) religion of masonry, forbids the working of the Master's part in private lodges, and arbitrarily imposes on the English craft the use of two compound words, Entered Apprentice and Fellow Craft, which had no previous existence in its terminology. Brother Gould believed that at the formation of the grand lodge in 1717 it inherited from the time immemorial Masons only two degrees, and that the fellow Craft and Master Mason were one.

AN EARLY SPECULATIVE MASON

The earliest record of a speculative Mason being admitted to a lodge is the record of the Lodge of Edinburgh, June 8, 1600, when John Boswell, the Laird of Auchenleck, attested his presence with his mark.

AN OLD LANDMARK

One of the most prominent of Masonic historical landmarks is contained in the diary of Elias Ashmole, the celebrated antiquary and founder of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, when he wrote: 1646, October 16, 4:30 p.m. I was made a Freemason at Warrington, in Lancashire, with Col. Henry Mainwaring, etc. Brother N. Rylands has conducted an exhaustive research into the records of the lodge into which Elias Ashmole was initiated, with the result of finding that there was probably not a single member of the lodge at that time an operative.

SYMBOLS IN EGYPT

Ancient Egypt has ever been of interest to the student of Masonry. In ancient Egypt we find the building of temples and the teaching of character building by the use of symbols at an early period. We also find a legend that is of the most fascinating interest to every Mason. Our ancient brother, the great Pythagoras, is reputed to have received the degrees of Masonry in Egypt. The Greeks borrowed freely from the Egyptians, and the Eleusinian mysteries contain the same allegory of the resurrection to a future life as those of Persia and Egypt, with modified detail. In the foundation of Cleopatra's Needle in 1879 were found a rough ashlar, a perfect ashlar, a square, a trowel, a trestle-board and a hieroglyph (meaning temple), all placed in such position as to show that they were used as symbols.

EARLY CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

In China the implements of architecture were used in a system of moral philosophy at a very early date. Mencius, who wrote about 300 B.C., said: A master Mason, in teaching his apprentices, makes use of the compasses and the square. Ye who are engaged in the pursuit of Wisdom, must also make use of the compasses and the square. In a book called Great Learning, 500 B.C., we find that A man should abstain from doing unto others what he would not they should do unto him; and this is called the principle of acting on the square.

WHY WE MEET

We meet for the purpose of admitting members to our fellowship, to instruct them in the lessons and principles (of Masonry) and to strengthen each other in adherence thereto, said George W. Speth, in a public lecture in 1892. We meet to hand down to succeeding generations the knowledge and practice of certain ceremonies, which we have ourselves inherited from our Masonic ancestors, and the analogues of which can be traced in the remotest antiquity... Lastly we meet to practice our three grand principles of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth.

THE FIVE SENSES

The five senses may be defined as man's faculty for receiving impressions, and are the means by which he received his knowledge of the material world. Their proper use enables us to form just and accurate notions of the operations of nature, to provide sustenance for our bodies, to ward off danger, to enjoy the blessings which God has given us, and contribute to the happiness and comfort of others. Their improper use tends to impair our faculties and weakens our power to grow. Masonry urges us to make proper use of these senses and thereby attain to the fullness of true manhood. (C.C. Hunt, Iowa).

MORE ABOUT SYMBOLISM

Two features of Freemasonry are particularly prominent, its teachings of morality by means of symbolism, and the antiquity of its symbols.

A ritual was used in the Ancient Mysteries which many Masons believe to be predecessors of the Freemasonry of today, and from which many of our forms and ceremonies may have been either directly or indirectly derived. It contained a dialogue, darkness, light, death and resurrection. In the times in which the Ancient Mysteries flourished, the most important truths of science as well as morality were taught to the qualified and were veiled from the multitude by symbolic teaching.

The square and compasses used in China 500 B.C. as emblems of morality, and the tools of Speculative Masonry, found in the foundation of Cleopatra's Needle, are evidences of the age of masonic symbolism. The Masons may have borrowed the symbolism of the original users and adapted it to the present as well as they could with limited knowledge of its original significance, or it may have come down to them through unbroken sources.

WORDS AND SIGNS

Attached to the Harleian ms, (1665) is a scrap of paper on which is written there is several words and signs of a Freemason to be revealed to you which as you will answer before God at the great and terrible day of judgement you keep secret and not to reveal the same in the ears of any person but to the Masters and fellows of the said society of Freemasons so help me God. This is the earliest mention of words and signs in the Old Charges of Masons.

ANCIENT PHILOSOPHERS

Thales of Miletus had been the first of the philosophers, the first to tread the ground of the interpretation of nature in principles of the understanding. He and the others of that early school though to find the elemental principle, one in air, another in water, another in fire, another in chaotic primeval matter. Then came Pythagoras with his teaching that number was the essence of all things. He and his school said that as the forms and proportions of all things are referred at last to number, so number is necessarily the principle of things. Not only, said they, is 1 the point, 2 the line, 3 the plane, and 4 the solid, but quality is 5, justice is 9, temperance but a number, fortitude a number, prudence a number. Their error lay in mistaking the symbol for the essence (M.W.G.M. Melvin M. Johnson, Roxbury, Mass., 1916).

THE SECRET PRINCIPLE

It is singular that the philosophical historian, in tracing the progress of various peoples, and in noticing the institutions which served to develop their intellectual and moral capabilities, should have passed by, nearly, without note or comment, those remarkable associations, which, although working in silence and secrecy, achieved no mean or unimportant task, in the great work of human education, and social regeneration and advancement. The universal prevalence of the secret principle, in both ancient and modern times, is of itself a most significant fact, and of sufficient magnitude to arrest the attention of all earnest and intelligent minds. The secret institution could not have existed, as it has done, through all time, or at least since the dawn of civilization, enlisting the warmest sympathies of the purest and best of men -- the fathers of civilization, the chiefs of philosophy, and science, and art -- unless it had responded, in a degree at least to some of the most urgent and vital needs of humanity. (Philosophical History of Freemasonry, Arnold).

OLD TRACING BOARDS

To the Masonic student reviewing changes which have taken place in forms and ceremonies during the past 200 years, the old tracing boards and charts furnish much that will repay scrutiny. The emblems of fidelity, and the sword pointing to a naked heart, are missing from the old tracing boards of the eighteenth century, and the number of steps of the winding stairs is seven in most cases. In some of the old tracing boards we find three windows as the three lights of a Lodge, and the broached thurnel as a substitute for the perfect ashlar. In the latter half of the 18th century the ancients displayed the operative tools on the floor of the Lodge; while the moderns used a drawing to illustrate them. The suspended key of the old tracing boards has no significance to the Mason unfamiliar with the ritual of the 18th century.

DECLINE OF ARCHITECTURE

The human race has two books, two registers, two testaments -- architecture and printing, the Bible of stone and the Bible of paper. Up to the time of Gutenberg architecture was the chief and universal mode of writing. In those days, if a man was born a poet he turned architect. Genius scattered among the masses, kept down on all sides by feudality, escaped by way of architecture, and its Iliads took the form of cathedrals. From the moment that printing was discovered, architecture gradually lost its virility, declined and became denuded. Being no longer looked upon as the one all-embracing sovereign and enslaving art, architecture lost its power of retaining others in its service. Carving became sculpture; imagery, painting; the canon, music. It was like the dismemberment of an empire on the death of its Alexander -- each province making itself a kingdom. (Victor Hugo).

MASON S MARKS

One of the subjects of great interest to the Masonic student is that of Mason s marks. These are found in great profusion both in the form of letters and geometrical designs, some of them apparently intended as proprietary marks, of the workmen who used them, and as symbolic marks. The first authentic documents on the regulation of marks are said to have been found in German ordnances in 1462. This does not prove, however, that there were not regulations preceding that date. One instance is known of a mark descended to the user from his father, who obtained it from the grandfather, who received it from the Lodge. It is an odd fact that there is no reference in the Old Constitutions of England to proprietary marks, and this phase of the subject is shrouded in uncertainty.

ROYAL ARCH MASONRY

The oldest minutes of Royal Arch Masonry discovered are those of Fredericksburg Lodge, Virginia, Dec 22, 1753, and the earliest records in England of 1758. The Royal Arch is now the most popular and universally practiced of the so-called higher degrees. The earliest recorded reference to it so far discovered was found in 1743, when the master of the lodge at Youghai, Ireland, was preceded by the Royal Arch carried by two Excellent Masons.

RULE AND LINE

The rule directs that we should punctually observe our duty and press forward in the path of virtue, neither inclining to the right or left. The line teaches moral rectitude, to avoid dissimulation in conversation and action, and to direct our steps in the path which leads us to immortality. The plumb admonishes us to walk uprightly in our station, to hold the scales of justice in equal poise. The Square and compasses are emblematical of the mathematical sciences and useful arts. (A. Lewis, London).

DUTY

Every crime against our laws, every sin against decency and morality, every sharp practice against square dealing in business, is a serious reflection on the Masonic Lodge, in the neighborhood in which it is committed. Masonry should not take the pure principles of morality and preserve them in the walled up seclusion of lodge halls, like as we preserve fruit and vegetables and keep them in dark cellars for our own use; but our lodges and our lives should be as lighthouses, blazing out the truths of right living, to bless the community, state and nation, in which we have our being. (Milton Winham, P.G.M., Arkansas).

SOURCES OF LIBERTY

Two-thirds of the Masons of the world are to be found in North America, and have built upon the sure foundation of a belief in God. Since France removed the Holy Writings from its altars and struck from its ritual all reference to the Bible and a belief in and dependence upon the Supreme Being it has practically stood still, Masonically. With one-third the population of the United States, its three rival Grand Lodges have less members under their obedience than a single American grand jurisdiction. We refuse to acknowledge anyone as a brother Mason who does not put his trust in God. We cannot substitute for this, vague platitudes concerning Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. They have not comprehended the source from which true liberty springs. (Aldro Jenks, P.G.M., Wisconsin).

THE TRIANGLE

The triangle with its three sides has played a great part in the traditions of Asia, in the philosophy of Plato, in Christianity; indeed in all religions and all mysteries. It has ever been regarded as the image of the Supreme Being. Neither the line nor two lines can represent a perfect geometrical figure. But three lines, by their juncture, form a triangle, the first, the primal perfect figure. This is one reason why it serves to symbolize the Eternal Who, infinitely perfect in His nature, is as the creator, the first being, consequently the first perfection. There are three essential degrees in Masonry, three secret words of three syllables each. There are three grand masters. There are three principal officers of a lodge. This continual reproduction of the number three, of which I have given only a few instances, is not accidental nor without profound meaning. The same is to be found in all the ancient mysteries. (M.W.G.M. Melvin M. Johnson, Roxbury, Mass., 1916).

PAUL REVERE

Col. Paul Revere was initiated in St. Andrew's Lodge, Boston, Mass., Sept. 4, 1760, and was Grand Master from December 12, 1794 to December 27, 1797. In a letter to the secretary of the Massachusetts Historical Society relating to the events of April, 1775, he said: We held our meetings at the Green Dragon tavern. We were so careful that our meetings should be kept secret that every time we met, every person swore upon the Bible, that they would not discover any of our transactions, but to Messrs. Hancock, Adams, Doctors Warren, Church, and one or two more.

SECRECY

Within proper bounds, Masons may and should welcome publicity. A secret society is one which seeks to conceal its existence and its objects. Freemasonry is not such a society and is secret only as to the obligations, means of recognition, ballots upon candidates and forms and ceremonies observed in conferring degrees. With the exception of those particulars, Masonry has no reservations from the public. As to everything else -- its design, its moral and religious tenets and the doctrines taught by it, the time and place of its meetings, the names of the officers of a Lodge and those belonging to it -- are all in no way secret and may be known by any one. (Committee on Publicity, Connecticut Grand Lodge).

THE SQUARE

The square as an emblem is geometrical and not mechanical in its origin according to authorities, who trace it back to the ancient Egyptians, who in solemn processions carried the cubit of justice, by which perpendiculars, right angles and squares might be laid out, its form being that of one arm of a square, with the inner end cut to an angle of 45 degrees.

The close analogy between justice and that which is perfectly upright is so obvious as to have become universal. The terms an upright man and a just man are in nearly all languages synonymous, hence the scriptural phrases: The way of the just is uprightness; thou, most upright, dost weigh the path of the just; He that walketh uprightly and the admonition to walk uprightly before God and man. Besides this, the square was used in Egypt to redetermine the boundaries of each man's possessions when, as frequently happened, the landmarks were swept away by the inundation of the Nile, thus recovering to every man his just rights. The Egyptian land-measure itself was an aroura or a square, containing one hundred cubits.

The square representing the fourth part of a circle, has a direct allusion to division of the ecliptic and celestial equator into four equal parts, indicative of the solstitial and equinoctial points, and the division of the year into four seasons. By it we are also enabled to divide the circle of the horizon into quadrants, and by the aid of the sun in the south to correctly mark out the four cardinal points of the compass. In not only geometry, but astronomy also, the use of the right angle is indispensable.

MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

One of the hidden mysteries of ancient Freemasonry is that symbolism which teaches that character can be built or developed in only one way, and that is by doing good to others. It is hidden from those who are unworthy to receive it but it unveils itself to those who seek truth, ask for light, and knock at the door of their better nature.

Man cannot assume a moral obligation; nor can anyone thrust a moral obligation upon him. With every acquisition of knowledge a moral obligation automatically attaches to him.

SPIRITUAL WEALTH

Mason receiving the third degree should be entering upon a lifetime of study, self-improvement and service to his fellows, and his lodge is intended to be and should be the source of light and instruction and a field for serious and devoted work for the principles, which our institution inculcates and upon which it is founded. The conception that the prosperity and greatness of a lodge is measured by its large membership and its wealth is erroneous. That lodge is prosperous and great which commands the affections of its members, and displays spiritual rather than material wealth. (William Rhodes Harvey, P.G.M., California).

A REMARKABLE RITUAL

The ritualism of Masonry is truly a wonderful thing. Simple in its dignity and with no striving for dramatic effect, its power is so intense that, when even fairly rendered, levity is impossible and the initiate is consciously impressed with a serious grandeur. So distinctive is it in its character that ten consecutive words from it cannot be used in the press, on the rostrum or in conversation without practically every Mason recognizing them; so quaint in its context that its antiquity is instantly impressed on the hearer; so tuneful in its rhythm that it rivals the stately measure of poetry; so natural in its movements and so devoid of restraint that its force is felt at first subconsciously but the words often spoken always convey a new idea; and withal, so lofty in its principles and so true its precepts that it is not a wonder some men make Masonry their religion. (Louis H. Fead, P.G.M., Michigan).

EARLY ABSTAINERS

The first temperance society on record was established by the Free Masons of Italy, just a century since. On the 28th of April, 1748, Pope Clement XII issued his celebrated bulletin forbidding the practice of Free Masonry by the members of the Roman Catholic church. Many of the Masons of Italy continued, however, to meet; but for the purpose of evading the temporal penalties of the bulletin, which extended in some instances to the infliction of capital punishment, they changed their exoteric name, and called themselves Xerophagists. This is a compound of two Greek words signifying those who live without drinking. This title they selected because they then introduced a pledge of total abstinence into their by-laws. (Charles Scott).

MASONRY

A regular system of morality, veiled in allegory, and illustrated by symbols.

The subjugation of the human that is in man by the divine; the conquest of the appetites and passions by the moral sense and reason; a continual effort, struggle and warfare of the spiritual against the material and sensual.

Masonry is the activity of closely united men, who, employing symbolic forms borrowed principally from the mason's trade and from architecture, work for the welfare of mankind, striving morally to ennoble themselves and others, and thereby to bring about a universal league of mankind, which they aspire to exhibit even now on a small scale.

ILLITERACY AN ENEMY

It requires the educated mind to appreciate and give expression to the high ideals of Freemasonry. Illiteracy, therefore, is an enemy to the Masonic institution. This is not a new conception as is evidenced by the fact that in the Fellowcraft degree as handed down to us through the ages, the candidate's attention is pointedly directed to the necessity of becoming familiar with the liberal arts and sciences. It is not only vital to Freemasonry but absolutely essential to the establishment and perpetuation of democracies. (Aldro Jenks, P.G.M., Wisconsin).

A FORCE FOR GOOD

Our lodges should maintain that high efficiency of moral rectitude, in both principles and practices, which would be helpful and beneficial to the neighbourhoods in which they are located. While masonry is neither religious, political nor financial, yet it should stand among all these giving that moral support, to those just and correct relations, that each should sustain to the other. Masons, as men of the community, should in their conduct and conversation create and maintain that healthy public opinion, that assures respect to our churches and sanctity to our religion; that upholds our government and gives dignity to the enforcement of our laws; that sustains our various industries, and promotes honesty and fair dealings in all our financial relations; that creates the community stamina and loyalty; that brings peace and security to our homes, and joy and happiness to our hearts. (Milton Winham, P.G.M., Arkansas).

REGIUS MANUSCRIPT

The oldest of the known manuscript charges of Freemasonry, written about 1390, is in the old English of Chaucer's time, and is very difficult to read. This old manuscript contains 15 articles and 15 points, of which the following is a free transcript, care being taken to convey the spirit of the thought rather than literary accuracy:

ARTICLES

- (1) The Master must be a trusty man, an honorable and impartial medium between the lords who hire and the operatives who labor.
- (2) He must be punctual in his attendance at the assemblies.
- (3) He must take no apprentice for a term of less than seven years.
- (4) He must take no apprentices, save the free and well born.
- (5) He must take no mutilated person for an apprentice.
- (6) He must not take Craftsman's wages for apprentices' labor.
- (7) He must take no immoral or depraved person for an apprentice.
- (8) Finding an employee incompetent, he must immediately discharge him.
- (9) He must undertake no work that he cannot finish.
- (10) No master shall supplant another in his business.
- (11) He shall not require his workmen to work by night, except in search of knowledge.
- (12) He shall speak no evil of his fellows' work.
- (13) He must instruct his apprentices in the Masonic science.
- (14) The Master shall take no apprentices for whom he has not sufficient labor.
- (15) He shall not compromise with his fellows in their sins for any profit.

POINTS

- (1) The Mason must love God and his brethren.
- (2) He must work diligently in working hours that he may lawfully refresh himself in the hours of rest.
- (3) He must keep the secrets of the brethren with fidelity.
- (4) He must be true to the Craft.
- (5) He shall receive his wages without murmuring.
- (6) He shall not turn a working day into a holiday.
- (7) He shall not carnally lie with a brother's wife.
- (8) He must be just and true to his Master and brethren in every capacity.
- (9) He shall treat his brethren with equity and in the spirit of brotherly love.
- (10) He must live peacefully and without contention with his brethren.
- (11) Seeing a brother about to err he must admonish him with kindness.
- (12) He must maintain the general regulations of the Craft.
- (13) He shall commit no theft or succor a thief.
- (14) He must be steadfast to these laws and to the laws of his country.
- (15) He shall submit to the lawful penalty for whatever offences he may commit.

Those wishing a description of this manuscript may consult the Wisconsin Grand Lodge Research committee's pamphlet entitled "The Old Charges."

WHY FREEMASONRY SURPASSES

It is in its symbols and allegories that Freemasonry surpasses all other societies, says Oliver Day Street. If any of them now teach by these methods, it is because they have imitated Freemasonry. In our Masonic studies, the moment we forget that the whole and every part of Freemasonry is symbolic or allegoric, the same instant we begin to grope in the dark; its ceremonies, signs, tokens, words and lectures at once become meaningless or trivial. The study of no other aspect of Freemasonry is more important.

MYSTICAL NUMBERS

One of the many interesting and important assertions made by Dr. Mackey in his History of Freemasonry, which may be found in the Wisconsin Consistory library, Scottish Rite cathedral, is that a predilection for mystical numbers occurs in all the churches of the mediaeval period. Thus the cathedral of Rheims has seven entrances, and both it and the cathedral of Charters have seven chapels around the choir. The choir of Notre Dame at Paris has seven arcades. The cross aisle is 144 feet long, which is sixteen times nine; and 42 feet wide with is six times 7. The towers of Notre Dame are 204 feet high, which is 17 times 12, the astronomical number. The length of the church of Notre Dame at Rheims is 408 feet, or 34 times 12. The cathedral of Notre Dame has 297 columns; but 297 divided by 3 gives 99, and this divided by 3 again produces 33. The naves of St. Ouen, at Rouen, and of the cathedrals of Strasburg and Charters are of the same length -- 244 feet. The Saint Chapelle, at Paris, is 110 feet long and 27 feet wide; but 110 is 10 times 11, and 27 is 3 times 9. In these few examples we have developed the numbers 3,7,9,10,11 and 12, all of which have been retained in the mystical system of the Speculative Freemasons; and their appearance among the mediaeval Masons could have been neither by accident or coincidence, but must have arisen from a pre-determined selection.

THE LODGE

Dudley in his Naology says that the idea that the earth was a level surface and of a square form may be justly supposed to have prevailed generally in the early ages of the world. The biblical idea was that the earth was square. Isaiah (xli 13) speaks of gathering the dispersed of Judah from the four comers of the earth, and in the Apocalypse (xx,9) in the vision of four angels standing on the four corners of the earth. So thoroughly grounded were these beliefs that in ancient times the square, now the recognized symbol of the lodge, was the recognized symbol of the earth, as the circle was of the sun. In this antiquated expression Oblong square, we therefore have not only an apt description of the ancient world and evidence that the lodge is symbolic thereof, but also a remarkable evidence of the great age of Freemasonry. (Oliver Day Street in Symbolism of the Three Degrees).

NOT A RELIGION

Freemasonry, says George W. Speth, is not a religion. It admits men of all religions.

The Deputy District Grand Master of Burman wrote to me from Rangoon:

:I have just initiated Mounng (i.e. Mr.) Ban Ohm, a Burman, who has so far modified his religious belief as to acknowledge the existence of a personal God. The W.M. was a Parsi, one Warden a Hindu, or Brahmin, the other an English Christian, and the Deacon a Mohammedan.

UNION OF PRINCIPLES

It has been noted, says Dr. Mackey, as an evidence of the union of principles which began to distinguish the architects of and after the Tenth century, who called themselves Freemasons, that in the time of Caesar a habitation in Helvetia differed more from a dwelling in the northern part of Italy, though the regions were adjacent, than the church reared in England and Sweden did from one erected in Sicily or Palestine, remote as the countries were from each other (quoted from Mr. Thomas Hope). Now let it be remembered that this unity of design was introduced by the Traveling Freemasons; that these derived a knowledge of the great principles of the art of building from the artificers sent by the Roman College, in company with the legions of the Roman army, into all the conquered provinces... and finally that these stone-masons, for purposes of their own aggrandizement, admitted non-professionals... into their ranks, who eventually overcame the former in influence and numbers and transmuted the Operative into a Speculative institution.

THE ANCIENT SECRET

Michelet, in his History of France, says on the subject of the secret of the mediaeval Masons that it was geometrical, and consisted of an application of the science of numbers, used in a mystical sense, to the art of building according to the principles of Gothic architecture, which was the peculiar style of the Freemasons, says Dr. Mackey in his History of Freemasonry. He says that this geometry of beauty, as he calls it, is conspicuous in the type of Gothic architecture, as exhibited in the cathedral of Cologne. This is a regular body which has grown in its appropriate proportions with a regularity equal to that of the formation of crystals. The cross of this church is strictly deduced from the figure by which Euclid constructs the equilateral triangle.

HOW THE LAWS DEVELOPED

The jurisprudence of Freemasonry emphasizes the importance of conforming to ancient usages, and has much in common in this respect with the common law of England. The written laws of Freemasonry have been gradually developed as necessity seemed to warrant. Sometimes they were modified to protect certain interests which appeared to be vital to the harmony of the Craft as, for example, the legislative action in regard to jurisdiction. Prior to 1717, when lodges may by immemorial usage, there does not appear to have been any question as to jurisdiction, and brethren would meet and practice the rites of Freemasonry without authority other than their unquestioned time immemorial prerogative. The grand lodges of the United States were originally formed by lodges in the states declaring Masonic independence in emulation of the political Declaration of Independence.

IMPROVEMENT IN MASONRY

It is desirable that an approximation to Masonic ideals be obtained in its jurisprudence, and to accomplish this result the largest possible number of brethren should be well informed on the facts and theories bearing on the fraternity. If they fail in their duty to improve themselves in Masonry, an Institution will replace a Fraternity. To avoid such a catastrophe, each brother should contribute his best thought, knowing not only what the law is, but why it is so.

FRATERNITY AND PHILOSOPHY

In considering Freemasonry as a fraternity and a philosophy, there is disclosed a much more complex and diversified field of investigation than exists in its element as an institution. The four old lodges that met and formed the Grand Lodge of England in 1717, were, to a certain extent, both operative and speculative, and it is of first concern to determine the measure of the operative feature then existing, and the extent to which the speculative leaven had entered into the workings of the lodges just prior to the grand lodge era. Several widely quoted historians have held that the era mentioned was a period of transition from an operative art to a speculative science. Mackey, devoting the greater part of three volumes to the elucidation of this theory, traces the builders through the Roman colleges and the traveling Masons of the Tenth century to the Steinmetzen of Germany, the Mestrices des Masons in Gaul, the guilds of England and the lodges of Scotland, to whom were transmitted the secrets of the building craft and the spirit of fraternal cooperation in labor.

R.F. Gould, noted Masonic historian, says: If we go back to the Ancient Mysteries, we meet with dialogue, ritual, darkness, light, death and reproduction. Many features of the Mysteries were preserved until a comparatively late era, and to me at least it seems a not unreasonable conjecture that some of them may have survived without a break or continuity, and are now a part of Masonry.

Albert Pike says: I became convinced that in Freemasonry the Ancient Greater Mysteries were revived.

The Philosophies of all ages are of Masonic interest, and a possible cause for some of the obscurity, surrounding Masonic symbolism may be found in the influence wielded by alchemy, astrology and magic in the past.

OLD MASONIC MANUSCRIPTS

Seventy-eight of the old Masonic manuscript charges have been found, and within the last sixty years have been critically studied by some of the most scholarly craftsmen, who show what they meant to our ancient brethren, and the extent to which we may call the mediaeval guilds our Masonic ancestors. The Old Manuscripts are the connecting link between what Freemasonry is known to be (as established by research), and the theories concerning it in the past. Secrecy was maintained to a greater degree by the Craft before, than after the era of Grand Lodges, and only hints are given of the arcana that they possessed; but the Old Manuscripts contain evidence that our ancient brethren were the custodians of a system of morality not known to any other craft or guild.

GRAND LODGE ERA

In 1717 the Masonic Grand Lodge are commenced. It has been popularly called the revival. There appears to have been a period when the fraternity languished, and the theory has often been advanced that this was due to the decadence in architecture, and to the fact that cathedral building no longer claimed the skill and thought of the best talent of the world. Before the decadence began, the Craft was to a great extent connected with the guilds, and many historians claim that we are the direct descendants of the mason's guild.

SYMBOLISM

Masonic symbolism has claimed a large share of attention, and necessarily so, because Masonry without its symbolism would be a lifeless form. It is so conspicuously the most prominent feature that every reader is eager for works which will assist him to interpret it and reveal the hidden mysteries. Much has been written on this subject; but the book has never been produced, and probably never will be, that will fully explain the symbolism of Freemasonry.

MANY MASONIC BOOKS

The great interest that has been aroused by Masonry through many centuries is indicated by the great number of Masonic books that have been published. Dr. G.B.F. Kloss, one of the strongest exponents of the theory that the Freemasons derived their origin from the builders of the Middle Ages, wrote many works on the subject, but his most valuable contribution was A Bibliography of Freemasonry, published 1844, and containing a list of five thousand six hundred and forty-nine books on Masonry, which in all probability enumerated almost the entire number then in existence. Many of the more important Masonic works, however, are those of the modern school, published since the latter half of the Nineteenth century.

THE MODERN SCHOOL

The Early History and Antiquities of Freemasonry by George F. Fort, published in 1875, was the first Masonic history written according to modern critical methods, as he carefully separated facts and theory, and gave tradition its proper place. Much has since been brought to light, but he was a pioneer in that rational thought advocated by later historians, and the first to give us a substantial basis for the belief in our connection with the Comacine Masters, which has recently been amplified by Leader Scott...

CATHEDRAL BUILDING

The pre-eminence which cathedral building attained in Europe from about 1100 to 1500 A.D. is one of the most pertinent facts in history. During the Crusades, and for a period which lasted until the Reformation, there was in Europe a highly developed religious zeal which found its expression in the building of structures which are the wonder and admiration of mankind. Some have ascribed the principal ecclesiastical structures to the fraternity of Freemasons, depositaries of a concealed and traditionary science. There is probably some ground for this opinion and the earlier archives of that mysterious association, if they existed, might illustrate the progress of Gothic architecture, and perhaps reveal its origin.

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1997-07-01