

HISTORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL PAPER ABOUT FREEMASONRY

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I would like to say a few words to the newly raised Brothers. No doubt when going through the three degrees, you thought about many things regarding Freemasonry, such as what does it mean, what is its teachings, how old is it, how did it originate, and many other thoughts.

Now that you are a member and have received a copy of the Constitution of Grand Lodge, a copy of the Landmarks, and are entitled to purchase a copy of the Authorized Work, these will give you a lot of the answers, and it is a great advantage to your knowledge of Masonry if you study them.

There are also a great many books that have been written about the origin and antiquity of Freemasonry and what it means to us.

So, I would like to take this opportunity to give you a brief outline about Freemasonry, its origin, and its antiquity.

Friends and foes of Freemasonry agree that the institution is ancient and that it existed from time immemorial.

In fact, the precise origin of Freemasonry is yet to be ascertained, as the early records are lost. A lot of its ritual and many of its symbols passed on from one generation to another, largely by means of oral repetitions, instructions, and lectures, and have all the marks of antiquity. Some of the legends of Freemasonry carry us back to the day of Enoch.

The truth is that Freemasonry owes its origin to no one single source. Our history and symbolism have been influenced from many sources. It is a curious and startling fact that the religious mysteries of the Phoenicians were in the hands of a society called the Dionysian Artificers, a fraternal order of architects and builders who erected the temples and theatres of the Phoenician people. They had signs and words, they practised benevolence, and one of the peculiarities of their construction of buildings was that the timbers and stones to be used were hewn and prepared in the quarries and forests and brought to the site already to be placed in position.

It was about 1100 B.C. when we find these builders organized into groups or lodges, governed by a Master and two Wardens, and holding general assemblies at lebedos and elsewhere from time to time. Now we know that this order existed in TYRE when Solomon's temple was built in 1000 B.C. and until about 300 B.C. And we find faint traces of it down to the time of the Crusaders, 1500 or 1600 years later.

In the ruins of Pompeii, buried in 79 A.D. under the ashes of Mount Vesuvius and uncovered in 1878, as found a meeting place just as it stood 1800 years previously. In front of the buildings were two columns or pillars, and interlaced triangles carved on the walls, and on a pedestal in the room an altar with a symbolic design of rare beauty. This room had the appearance of an old Roman operative lodge.

Cleopatra's needle, the obelisk in Central Park, New York, was a gift to the United States from Egypt in 1878. It stood in the Great Temple of the Sun God at Heliopolis on the Nile, from the 15th Century B.C. In a cavity in its foundation were found all the emblems of the builders, a rough cube, a polished cube, a square, an iron trowel, a lead plummet, an arc of a circle, a stone trestle board, and a stone bearing the master's mark - all evidence that the builders worked in the light of a mystical faith.

The great cathedrals were not the work of individual artists, but of an organized group of builders who planned, built, and adorned them. Notre Dame Cathedral, the cornerstone of which was laid in 1163 A.D., was one of these cathedrals, and is still standing today.

They had Masters under Grand Masters. Their meeting places were called lodges. They had Masters, Wardens, oaths, tokens, grips, and passwords. They wore white gloves and aprons.

The square, compass, level, plumb line, and arch appear among their emblems. King Solomon's knot was one of these symbols - an interwoven cord - symbol of eternity.

And later the lion's paw sees their chief emblem.

In the operative days, whenever a church, abbey or cathedral was to be erected, a master builder would come with a few skilled assistants to the locality. Operative Masons came from

all dictions. They possessed means of making themselves known by signs and grips. Few of them could read or write, for certificates of membership were unknown and might be stolen.

These Masons would set up a lodge, and there they slept, studied their plans, received their instructions, and taught their apprentices. This was Operative Masonry.

By 1700, the building of great cathedrals was languishing in England and elsewhere, and lodges became more social than practical. The speculative or accepted Masons dominated the lodges and controlled the affairs.

In 1716, we find four lodges in London, at different taverns, and they held their meetings there. Their representatives met at the Apple Tree Tavern in June of that year and decided to form a Grand Lodge and did so on June 24th, 1717. They elected a code and constitution, a set of regulations. The Three Degrees were perfected about 1720-1721.

So began our Grand Lodge system and the beginning of Speculative Masonry.

I would like to say a few words, here, about the Grand Lodge. Grand Lodge is the governing body over the craft or blue lodges of which we are members. Now all organizations, if it is our church or country, or anything else, must have a governing body in order to exist.

Therefore, Grand Lodge is necessary to make the laws and rules for the lodges to follow, and as Grand Lodge officers are members of the lodges, they are in a good position to know what is best. So, if there was no Grand Lodge to govern the lodges, they would cease to exist.

Every Grand Lodge is governed by a Grand Master, who is elected each year at the Annual Grand Lodge Meeting and is chosen because of his integrity and fidelity and great knowledge of Freemasonry, and he is held in high veneration by the members of the craft, as well as other Grand Lodge officers.

Freemasonry is practised in many of the nations of the world and is the oldest known fraternal organization in the world, as far as we know. Freemasonry is an honourable fraternity, and one can be proud of being a member. Many of the kings of England were Masons; George Washington, the first president of the United States, was a Mason, and 15 of the other presidents were Masons. Many men of high eminence and statesmen in different countries of the world are Masons. There are many ministers and church leaders who are Masons, and many were Grand Masters.

Although Freemasonry is not a religion, it is founded on religious teachings. The Holy Bible is open on the altar and every meeting is opened and closed with a prayer.

Therefore, it is not surprising that in Freemasonry you will find no support for such theories as Communism, Atheism, or unbelief or anarchy and lawless disorder. But you will find a substantial support for a belief in a Supreme Being, the Author of the Universe, for the doctrine of a future life, for a doctrine of a resurrection to eternal life, for equal rights and justice for all, for freedom of thought and action, for the principles of the Golden Rule, for the duties we owe to ourselves, families and friends, and fellowmen, such as prudence, temperance, justice, fortitude, fidelity, courtesy, benevolence, and all the rest; for devotion to one's country, for the fatherhood of God, and the brotherhood of man.

Therefore, Freemasonry is the activity of closely united men who, employing symbolical 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.

My Brothers, that is Freemasonry. The builder that represents all that is good, such as prudence, temperance, justice and all the rest that goes to make a better world - the fraternal order of which you are now a member.