

Quest Book No. 2

Some Background for an Aspirant

How Old Is Masonry?

This question cannot be definitely answered. For Masonry was not created at a given moment, or even in a single day, month, or year. Its distant origins, the actual beginnings of our Craft, are veiled in the mists of antiquity. We find striking similarities in the Solar Mysteries of Egypt, which it is believed may have been evolved as early as the year 2000 B.C. Pythagoras, Plutarch, Plato, and Pindar were among the initiates into the Greater Mysteries, which were the repository of the highest then known "secrets" of astronomy, geometry, religion, the fine arts and the laws of nature. Centuries later, the Roman Collegia emerged; these were small, local groups of artisans – goldsmiths, dyers, builders, potters, and others. They acted upon petitions for membership, received members through initiation, had rooms like those of present day fraternities, divided the membership into grades, had a common table, had a charity fund, used passwords, grips, tokens, and symbols. Each group was self-governing. Some were religious (often pagan) in nature; others were socially inclined, while still others were mostly concerned with their particular trade or profession.

The Guilds

About the third century A.D., there began a series of incursions of warlike tribes from east of Europe, which finally overran the Roman Empire and destroyed the civilization of the time. For more than seven centuries the so-called Dark Ages ensued. Then Europe began gradually to re-erect its civilization, and one of the first features of this process was the development and training of craftsmen of all kinds. Later these craftsmen formed societies called "guilds," comprising the men in a particular locality who performed a definite and specific type of work or service. These were much like the old Collegia, though there seems to have been no connection between the two. Most of them had carefully guarded secrets, which members were bound not to reveal to non-members. (It is to be remembered that printing had not yet been invented, and only a relatively few people outside the clergy could read or write; therefore much of the practical knowledge and also of the learning of that day reposed within the crafts as trade secrets, and were handed down by word of mouth.)

Masons

Most of these artisans seldom went more than a day's journey away from home. However, this was not true of the stonemasons. Their work consisted largely of the erection of cathedrals, castles, and other large structures, many of which required many years, sometimes centuries, to complete. Local guilds were not equipped either in numbers or in skills to perform this type of work, and the Masonic craft of necessity became migratory. The employer, (often times the Church or the Crown) would select a Master of the Work, and he would arrange for the traveling of the various groups of workmen from their previous jobs to the site of the new work. There, after providing for their homes or barracks, they would construct a workshop which would be used also for rest, refreshment, and relaxation; this

was called a Lodge, and this word also designated the organized body of workmen who used the building.

Freemasons

Any type of builder was called a Mason, and the craft as a whole was called Masonry. It included quarrymen, wallers, hewers, slaters, tilers, rough masons, cutters, plasterers, carpenters, and all others who worked upon the Structure. At the head of the project were those who today would be called architects or engineers; they understood engineering and geometry as the result of long and arduous training, and many were proficient in a number of the "arts" connected with the building trade, such as carving and sculpturing, the making of stained glass windows, mosaics and other highly specialized skills. They were called "Freemasons," perhaps because they were free to move from place to place as they might desire, whereas the lesser workmen were generally serfs, and could travel only at the pleasure of their masters.

Masters

The guilds divided their members into apprentices, fellows, and masters. The former were lads in their teens. If, later, they exhibited exceptional skill, administrative ability, and qualities of leadership, they became "Masters"

Our Lineage

Now, there are Masons, some of them eminent, who have attempted to trace the lineage of Masonry, as one would trace his ancestry, back through the guilds and the Roman Collegia, even to the Ancient Mysteries, and they present substantial evidence in support of their hypothesis. But while their evidence is certainly plausible, some of it even credible, there are links in the chain of proof which remain hypothetical. For while studies of ancient peoples show that their religions, philosophies, social systems, folk thought and folk ways all had much in common, (and they do disprove the theory that) Masonry is the heritor of all that was good in the organizations, which preceded it, and its ritual clearly reflects that ancestry.

Operative and Speculative Masonry

The Masons of those days were actually builders, and their trade secrets were handed down from mouth to mouth, as has been said. This was true not only as to the proper way to do things, but it was also true of a philosophy based upon the tools they used, traces of which persist in our conversations of today, such as "On the square," "On the Level," "An upright man," etc. Because they were builders, we call them "Operative" Masons. But gradually there came about a change, following the Dark Ages. At first it was scarcely perceptible, but there came a day when someone sought membership who was in no way connected with the building trades, because he was attracted by the philosophical teachings of Masonry. Others followed in increasing numbers. (Incidentally, this is the origin of the term, "Ancient Free and Accepted Masons," these men though not builders, were "accepted" as Masons.)

The First Grand Lodge

This movement appears to have taken place during the seventeenth century. Undoubtedly it was greatly

influenced by the printing of the Bible in 1455. This and the other books, which followed, opened the field of knowledge to the common people, and they began to think. The Reformation had come in the early fifteen hundreds, when the Church of England broke away from the rule of Rome, and with it came an increased intellectual freedom, until, toward the end of the seventeenth century, it became evident that the building monopolies of operative masons had seen their day. No longer could the "secrets" of geometry and architecture be maintained; they became more or less common knowledge. Now, men of wealth, culture, and distinction of all manner of occupations were freely admitted to membership in the Craft, and their numbers grew until, in 1717, an event took place which marks the dividing line between the old Freemasonry and the new; between the last lingering remains of Operative Masonry and a Craft which is wholly speculative (that is, a theoretical Craft, rather than physical – a mental concept, rather than practical). In June of that year, four Lodges met and organized the first Grand Lodge of Masons. Its authority was at first limited to "within ten miles of London," but it soon invaded the provinces, and is today recognized as the "Mother Lodge" of Masonry.

How Old

Thus far, we have discussed the Background of Masonry without being too specific about the history of Masonry itself. Actually, it can be proven that it is old – very old. For there are in existence about a hundred of what are known as "The Old Charges," sometimes called constitutions; they were drawn up by individual Lodges and were used by them much as we use constitutions and by-laws in today's organizations. The best known of these is called the Regius Poem, or the Halliwell Manuscript (after the name of the man who discovered it in the British Museum). It was written about 1390 A.D., and it shows that even then Masonry was very old. There is rather convincing evidence that operative Masonry was in existence at least as early as the year 926 A.D.

Masonry in America

There seems to be no evidence of the advent of Freemasonry into America prior to 1717, though it is known that individual Masons did appear in the American colonies soon after that, and that they represented speculative Masonry. The first Lodge in America of which there is documentary evidence existed in Philadelphia as early as 1730. Three years later, on petition from a number of Masons living in Boston, the Grand Lodge of England appointed Henry Price as "Provincial Grand Master of New England and Dominions and Territories there unto belonging." Later in that year he formed a Grand Lodge, and then granted the petition of eighteen brethren, constituting them into a Lodge now known as Saint John's Lodge of Boston. St. Andrews Lodge No. 82, also of Boston, received its charter from the Grand Lodge of Scotland in 1756. Among its members were Joseph Warren, Samuel Adams, John Adams, Paul Revere, William Dawes, and Thomas Hutchinson, Governor of Massachusetts at the time.

American Independence

Space does not permit the telling of the story of Masonry during the American Revolution. We can only say that it is illustrious and that we can take great pride in it. George Washington was a Mason, as were General Warren (previously mentioned), LaFayette, and most of the other American generals. So were John Hancock, Benjamin Franklin, James Monroe, Anthony Wayne, Ethan Allen, and Nathaniel Greene, to mention just a few.

Following the war, it was quickly determined that since political relations had been severed between this country and England, Masonic allegiance to the Grand Lodges of England and of Scotland had also been severed. A new Grand Lodge was organized, and from it were chartered other Grand Lodges throughout the country. Today there are fifty-one Grand Lodges in the United States – one for each state and one for the District of Columbia.

Masonry in Minnesota

It was 1849; this was Indian country, and only a territory, not a state. St. Paul contained just eight frame buildings and several log cabins with bark roofs. When it was known that it was to be the seat of the territorial government, the population rapidly increased to three hundred. Some settlers from eastern lumbering states went up the St. Croix River and set up sawmills in a place they called Stillwater. There was a smaller settlement at St. Anthony Falls on the Mississippi River. In these three settlements, in Mendota and a few widely separated trading posts and missions, lived the entire white population.

The First Lodge

That spring the "Pioneer" carried a notice that there would be a meeting of Masons in a room over the Pioneer office. There were two more notices and meetings, the third one on July 16th, 1849, as a result of which a petition was prepared and addressed to the Grand Master of Ohio, asking for a dispensation to form St. Paul Lodge. Twelve men signed it. The dispensation was granted on August 8th and the first meeting was held a month later. The first Lodge room was in the attic of the St. Paul House, a log and weather-boarded building. The open rafters were tamarack poles, with the bark still on them. The floor was rough pine. Nail kegs were used for chairs, and barrels set on end for officers' pedestals. An overturned dry goods box served for an altar. The room was lighted with tallow dips, and heated with a wood-burning stove. A local tin-smith had fashioned some officers' jewels. Here the three degrees were first conferred in Minnesota in October of 1849.

An Early Initiation

In 1899, at the fiftieth anniversary of the Lodge, the second man initiated in it told of that event. His name was Kelly. He said that a man named Smith, who was territorial secretary, told him that he had found a few rusty Masons who needed a candidate to work on, and he thought Kelly would make good material. He appeared for his initiation, but he could not recall being received in any anteroom; if there was one, it might have been a corner of the Lodge room, screened off by a blanket thrown over a pole. When he entered the Lodge room, which looked much like a blacksmith shop, there was quite a discussion as to the next procedure. He was conducted about the room, and at each place where he stopped there was another discussion, only it was more involved each time. Finally, it reached an impasse, and the Master struck the top of his barrel (or was it the bottom), and ordered everyone to sit down, including the candidate, while he explained the "Work." Somewhere we have read that the candidates were kept locked up in a store down the street, and when the time came for their appearance, someone leaned out the window and whistled for them!

Other Lodges

By November of that year, 1849, there were eight brethren in Stillwater, and they petitioned their nearest Grand Lodge, in Wisconsin, for a dispensation; this was granted in October of

1850. In 1851, a physician by the name of Ames, who became Grand Master two years later, came to St. Anthony, and that year he founded the first Lodge at that place. They obtained their dispensation from the Grand lodge of Illinois, where Ames had been made a Mason.

The Grand Lodge

The Grand Lodge of Minnesota was formed in February of 1853. There weren't enough members to fill all of the offices, and some appointments had to be made outside of the official family. The Grand Chaplain, a man named Chamberlain, wasn't even a Master Mason, though he was raised two days later to qualify him. He was Rector of Holy Trinity Episcopal Church of St. Anthony, and a native of New York State. A large, robust man, and two fisted, no lumberjack talked out of turn when he was around! He traveled on foot between St. Anthony and St. Cloud, with a pack on his back, preaching as he went. One time he met a painter in St. Cloud, who had not been paid for some work he had done on the church and he told Chamberlain that if he didn't get his money at once, he would take it out of his hide. When the painter got up and brushed himself off, Chamberlain told the onlookers that if the church owed anyone else any money, he would like to pay all its debts in this way.

Another Lodge

The first lodge west of the Mississippi and the first one to receive its original charter from the Grand Lodge of Minnesota, was Hennepin No. 4, across the river from St. Anthony, on the Fort Snelling reservation. In the dispensation, which was dated in June of 1853, the Grand Master called the place Minneapolis.

So much for glimpses of the early days in Minnesota Masonry. We wish we could go on with more, and that we could pay tribute to all those sturdy pioneers whose names are written in the Masonic annals of our state. But here we must stop. For a more extended treatment, see the book, "Centennium", published by the Grand Lodge of Minnesota.

So much for the history of Masonry, as briefly as we can state it, and still outline its principal features. There is a wealth of material on the subject, and it makes fascinating reading; we commend it to you. Perhaps one of the best sources is, "A History of Freemasonry," by Haywood and Craig.

The Essence of Masonry

Earlier in this discussion we dwelt at length on operative Masonry, barely mentioning the entry of the speculative – though we did give you a hint of its nature. As a matter of fact, Freemasonry has both a physical and an intellectual, or spiritual, nature. The former is the organization itself, manifested in its rites and ceremonies; these have been brought down to us from ancient times and are still preserved, largely in ancient form. Back of the physical, however, hidden by a veil of allegory and symbolism, but constituting the very heart of Masonry, lie its spiritual values – the lessons it teaches. Only because of these fundamental truths, the rock upon which Masonry has builded, and the steadfast courage of the men who have upheld its banner, has Masonry endured through the ages.

Organization

It is, of course, essential that you know something about how Masonry is organized, and for the present, we shall confine ourselves to a brief outline.

Blue Lodges

We have already mentioned the Grand Lodges of the various states, each supreme in its own jurisdiction. They charter, or "constitute," subordinate lodges, popularly known as "Blue Lodges," and the Lodge, which you are about to enter is one of them. Its principal officers are the Worshipful Master, Senior Warden, Junior Warden, Treasurer and Secretary. Other officers are a Senior Deacon, Junior Deacon, Chaplain, Senior Steward, Junior Steward, Marshal, and Tyler. The five principal officers are elected annually and the others are appointed by the Master. All their respective duties will be made clear to you later. The Master's authority is beyond question, the only appeal from his decision being to the Grand Lodge.

Meetings are called Communications, and may be "Stated" or "Special." The former refers to a meeting held at a stated time and hour specified in the by-laws, while the word "Special" means a meeting at some other time, called at the will and pleasure of the Master.

The Three Degrees

The fundamental principles of Freemasonry are exemplified in three degrees: the Entered Apprentice, the Fellowcraft, and the Master Mason. The first is not to be regarded merely as a stepping stone to the second, nor the second to the third; they should, rather, be thought of as a series of concentric circles, the smaller contained in the larger, for in a very true sense, the Master Mason is still an Entered Apprentice, as he is also a Fellowcraft.

Your Duties

You will become a member of this Lodge when you have received the three degrees and have signed the bylaws. It will always be your duty to be loyal to the fraternity, faithful to your superior officers, and obedient to Masonic law. You will be expected to pay your dues promptly and regularly, to stand ready to help a worthy brother Mason in sickness or distress, and to support the charities of the Lodge as your conscience shall direct and your means permit. You are also expected to attend the communications as regularly as possible, and to discharge promptly and efficiently such specific Masonic duties as may be assigned to you.

Being a Mason means being a good citizen, loyal to your government, and conducting yourself as a wise and upright man, charged with an *individual responsibility* for maintaining the world's respect for Masonry.

Masonic Education

Now that you have knocked at our portal and will soon be permitted to cross its threshold, you will hear more of these things. The meaning of all you will hear and see may not be entirely clear to you at the time, for Masonry's method of instruction is such that its significance can hardly be immediately apparent to the initiate. That is the purpose of this Educational Committee. We shall meet with you after you have received your first degree, again after the second degree, and after the third. In these meetings we shall endeavor to clear up any questions about the work which you may have in mind, for we want you to become an honor to the Craft, and a well informed Mason is rather apt to be a good Mason.

An Acknowledgement

The Masonic Research and Education Committee, in presenting Minnesota's educational program for its candidates, recognizes its debt to the Grand Lodges of Iowa, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, for making their work available to us.