

Whence Come You? And Whither Are You Travelling

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How old is Freemasonry?

Nothing strikes so much to the imagination as the story of how travellers have found Freemasonry in darkest Africa, or among ancient peoples in china or Central America, or that evidence has been found that it existed in Egypt 40,000 years ago. It has in times past been attributed to many sources, including the ancient patriarchal religion, the ancient mysteries of the pagan world, the Temple of Solomon and the Temple builders, the Crusaders, the Knights Templar; to the Rosicrucian philosophers of the Sixteenth century; to Oliver Cromwell, for the advancement of his political schemes; to the Pretender, as a means towards the restoration of the House of Stuart; to Sir Christopher Wren, at the building of St. Paul's Cathedral, and to Dr. Desaguliers and his associates.

Some of these theories are today regarded as fantastic and ridiculous and have been long since abandoned. The fact is that Freemasonry owes its origin to no one single source. In the earliest history of mankind, nothing could be said to have been Freemasonry either in ritual or organization, and the same is true in every century until about 1717.

The soul of Freemasonry is its spirit, its principles and its symbols, and these existed long previously to the recorded history of mankind and have come down to us today from widely different sources.

Our task would be easier if instead of seeking the source of the great river and tracing its later development, we explored it from the present time up the main stream of speculative masonry through its transition period to the operative Masons of earlier days; to the castle and cathedral builders of the Middle Ages; to the gilds of Freemasons in France, Germany, England, Scotland and Ireland; to that famous band of Comacine Masters who built the churches of southern Europe; to the burial societies and colleges of artificers of ancient Rome; to the Dionysian Builders of Asia Minor; to the sacred mysteries of Britain, Rome, Greece and Egypt; to the Phoenician builders of Solomon's

Temple; to the worship of the Sun God beside the Nile and in Persia; to the temple builders of Karnak and Memphis, Babylon and Nineveh; to the faint beginnings of the spiritual yearnings of Man.

As we go back up the river, we find here and there a new stream contributing to the ever-growing and ever-broadening volume of waters; a new idea; a new ceremony; an allegory; a tradition; a legend; a landmark.

A whole evening might be given to describing these various sources of our beloved Order. It is a fascinating story, ending in the gradual decline of building, the languishing of the operative lodges, their transition into speculative bodies and the formation between 1717 and 1736 of the three Grand Lodges in the British Isles from which every regular Grand Lodge in the world today derives its origin directly or indirectly.

We have come a long way. Inspirations have come from many sources and a close study of the fascinating story discloses a number of things;

- The fraternal idea, comradeship, fellowship among the builders, has always existed and persisted;
- The idea of building guilds has always existed;
- The close identification of the Craft with religion, the ancient mysteries, and later with Christianity;
- The continuity of these ideas from very ancient times, because building and religion have always been factors in civilization; there has always been religion and there has always been building; they have continued side by side; such knowledge was common and was shared everywhere, no nation was ever isolated.
- Lastly, there was a gradual evolution – a flowing together. The many streams from many sources have come together and now flow on in one mighty stream or river.

We must realize, too, that this Order of ours is still growing. Instead of one Grand Lodge there are now a hundred. Instead of four lodges there are more than 40,000. Instead of the 100 members who formed the first Grand Lodge there are nearly four million.

There are many degrees and branches and orders in Masonry. New influences, social and economic, philosophic and religious, have come in. The Royal Arch blossomed out about 1740; the Knights Templar about 1760; the Scottish Rite about 1785. Benevolence funds were

first engrafted on the order about 1800, perhaps earlier, and charitable institutions were established about the same time.

Even the ritual has grown in variety and in beauty. Each jurisdiction decides what ritual it shall use and in many there are several in use. Charges and lectures and floor work are constantly revised and added to. In recent years there have been lodges for the study of our history, our symbolism and our jurisprudence. Past Masters' Associations and District organizations are modern growths, so is much of our Grand Lodge organization with its elaborate ceremonials and regalia and many offices. Lodges met at one time in taverns and later in rented halls and buildings; nowadays many lodges and Masonic bodies have fine temples of their own.

In recent decades there has been a deluge of other orders — juvenile and women's orders, claiming affiliation with Freemasonry. Our order is participating in social welfare work, establishing hospitals and scholarship funds, and even service clubs. These all have their influence on the order and affect its growth. Whether we realize it or not, Freemasonry has been constantly changing and adapting itself to the needs of humanity and rendering untold service in new ways.

To the three Grand Lodges of the British isles we in Nova Scotia owe our masonry. There is indeed some evidence to support the claim that Masonry was known among the French while they ruled the Province and among the English at Annapolis Royal as early as 1725. Be that as it may, the first lodge organized on Canadian soil under the authority of a Grand Lodge, was formed at Annapolis royal in June, 1738. The first master of that Lodge was Ensign Erasmus James Philipps, of the 40th Regiment, then stationed at Annapolis Royal. Philipps was initiated as a Mason in the First Lodge in Boston on Nov. 14, 1737, two hundred years ago tonight. His authority to establish a Lodge in Annapolis came from Henry Price, Provincial Grand Master for Massachusetts, who himself acted under the authority of the Grand Master of England.

Philipps continued as Provincial Grand Master until his death at Halifax in September 1760 while on a visit to Halifax, and is buried in old St. Paul's Cemetery.

England, Scotland and Ireland, have all played their part in extending the Order, not only in Nova Scotia but throughout Canada, and it is appropriate that we should next July commemorate the founding of the Craft in Canada and review the progress of the past two centuries.

Visitors from many jurisdictions will gather here, and every Grand Lodge in Canada will participate in this commemoration. It will make us realize the size of our Masonic family and the strength of the ties of our worldwide Brotherhood. It will give us a new pride in our history and achievements, a new meaning to Masonry, its ideals and mission.

If the coming Bicentenary celebration next July will do nothing more than recall to our attention the marvelous progress of the Craft in the past two centuries, and so inspire us with new hope, new faith in ourselves and our order, and new courage to go forward, it will have been in itself a great achievement.

From that historic day in 1738 Masonry in Canada has moved forward to its present proportions. In place of one Lodge there are now 1300 lodges. Instead of a handful of Craftsmen, there are now nearly 200,000. Instead of there being but one man clothed with authority to propagate Masonry there are now nine sovereign and independent Grand Lodges, all developing the Craft within the borders of their respective jurisdictions.

The story is a long and intensely interesting one, and well worth the study of every Craftsman who loves the Order, full of names of men who have been leaders in the growth of our nation and people and our civilization; men of great distinction in Church and State, in professional and commercial life, in international affairs and community service — their names are legion and their work will never be forgotten.

Whither are we travelling? What of the future? We have been passing through an economic depression and it has had a sore effect on the Craft as well as on the nation. Let us look at the present situation, and, right here, there are several statements which should be made.

First of all, the Craft today is sound at its heart and is moving forward to greater achievements. It still rests upon the corner stone of all Faiths; and before it stand the two pillars of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man.

Then, let me say, Freemasonry has never yet exerted its full strength or even a fraction of its strength on any occasion. Take the requirement that every petitioner for our mysteries should declare his personal belief in god, the Father Almighty, the Great Architect and Master Builder of the Universe. If we could but really and effectively unite all Freemasons into one vast army, what a tremendous bulwark

Masonry would be against atheism, agnosticism, communism and those who would pull down the structure of our civilization and society, which is, in the last analysis, based on this belief in a Supreme and Almighty Being.

Then again, and let us be frank, while there are many members of the Order enrolled in our lodges, few of them are Masons guided and willing to be guided by its principles, living daily according to its precepts and thereby proclaiming to all the world by their very conduct their membership in the Order. If we could all so live, what a profound influence the Order would have not only upon ourselves but upon the community in which we live.

Then there is that thing we call Brotherhood and that virtue we call Charity and Benevolence, which after all is but Brotherhood in action. Masonry has been the inspiration of a thousand other fraternities, and some of them were formed because Freemasonry seemed to be ineffective in its Brotherhood. What a marvellous organization our 4,000,000 members could be if we really went to work at this business of Brotherhood!

Today Freemasonry has been banned and suppressed in Italy and Germany and Russia. Why? Simply because it stands for justice among men, freedom of thought and action and expression. Only under democracies, can Freemasonry prosper. Masonry is, in fact, one of the inspirations for our democracy. If it could be suppressed or if it died out, then a Hitler would arise in our midst.

We need have no fear for Freemasonry. It has survived the centuries, witnessed the rise and fall of kingdoms and Empires, world-shaking revolutions and economic crises without number. It will outlive the Hitlers and Mussolinis and Stalins. Dictators may seem to dominate and triumph for a time but they can never submerge the spiritual forces which govern all peoples, the inborn and universal belief in a Supreme Being, the Architect of the Universe, the Father of all mankind, the reality of the Brotherhood of man, expressed in our desire for equal Justice among men, the feeling of kindred among nations which emerges when a great crisis threatens and the desire for peace. These will never die and will persist long after all the "isms" and vain doctrines and irrational theories of today have been forgotten.

And so, let us look ahead into the years with faith and take courage. Freemasonry will exist as long as free peoples exist. Each needs the

other. Freemasonry will continue to exert that spiritual influence on men and institutions which it has always exerted. It will grow and extend its boundaries, working through its lodges and chapters, its various rites, its affiliated organizations, its methods of education and intellectual growth, its avenues of service and benevolence.

In spite of setbacks — and we must realize that they will come — Freemasonry will go on to greater strength and influence, throwing its weight behind the Church, the state, the community, and the forces of right and righteousness.

I make a threefold appeal. I appeal for a deeper and broader knowledge of masonry. Not just the right to wear some trinket or ring or watchfob. Masons who get no more out of Masonry than signs, grips and passwords, make a poor investment of their time and money. The Mason who has nothing but some parrot answers to some questions about the 1st and 2nd degrees, has only a thin veneer. How much of Masonic history and symbolism do you know? How much of it do you live and practise in your daily lives?

Again I appeal to you for a broader service, to ally ourselves with great ventures for humanity, caring for the widow and the aged and the orphan, helping to educate the underprivileged child, building up sane sentiment for the cause of peace, breaking down the attacks of communism, fascism, Hitlerism, atheism. Freemasons should pledge their support to every national And international effort for settlement of world conditions. International peace, the sanctity of treaties, disarmament, and the adjustment of economic difficulties; guard against the recurrence of the depression, or counteract atheistic and communistic propoganda and the influences of Bolshevism. Statesmen and leaders should be sought out and persuaded to address our lodges, for our Lodge membership is looking for information and counsel.

Lastly, I appeal to you for a truer brotherhood. If anything can save the world it is this brotherhood which binds us together as individuals, as communities, as provinces, as nations and empires, and gives the wider vision of life, inspiring us to larger loyalty and greater energy.

Let us be builders and pioneers as were our fathers before us. Let us be Masons who when the day is done can look back on something achieved. What good have I been to others today? Have I done a single thing within this day for a widow or a needy child? Have I kept

faith or failed in my dealings with my neighbour? Have I added one worthy thought to my store of knowledge.

They have achieved success when they have lived well, laughed often and loved much; when they have gained the respect of intelligent men and the love of little children; when they have filled their niche and accomplished their task; when they have left the world better than they found it, whether by an improved poppy, a perfect poem, or a rescued soul; when they have never lacked appreciation for earth's beauty not failed to express it; when they have looked for the best in others and given the best they had; whose work is an inspiration, whose memory is a benediction.