

The Crisis in Freemasonry

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The author of this article wishes to emphasize the fact that he regards his brother English Craft Freemasons as constituting the most high-minded and worthy class of men in the country, and their friendly and charitable activities as most useful and laudable. The opinions set forth are purely speculative considerations advanced in the interests of the Craft, which are seriously threatened by recent developments in Masonic movements, particularly outside England.

The conversation veered round to the subject of Freemasonry naturally enough. It was a perfect day for a final half round of golf; yet Ashford, plus 2, our captain, had gone up to town, excusing himself, with a certain brusque solemnity, on the ground that he had to attend Grand Lodge, of which he was, as books of reference attested, V.W.P. Pres. Brd. G. Pur.

"Must have cost him over a thousand, one way and another," remarked a long lean sallow man in the corner, who looked as if he had spent most of his life in the tropics.

"Oh, then you are a Mason?" chirped our favourite club Wit, a cross between a magpie and a monkey.

"Try me and prove me," murmured the dark man, without stirring.

"I'm the 28th degree myself."

"Shake hands."

The Wit was rather embarrassed, but did not quite see how to refuse. He complied, rather awkwardly.

The long man grimly smiled.

There was a curious tension among the crowd. We all felt as if we were present at some mysterious event, and as if the lean campaigner had us all at his mercy.

Thompson, the Secretary, threw himself (in the name of us all) frankly on that engaging quality.

The tall man took the bitten vulcanite of his briar from between his bicuspid.

"Our friend," he said slowly, "may belong to the 28th degree of the Ancient Order of Humbugs; but he isn't a Mason at all."

Johnstone rose to the occasion, and saved the situation by suggesting a general adjournment to the tee.

But I am convinced that I fozzled my approach to the third by undue pondering upon the sinister incident of the smoking-room.

It happens that I am a reader at the British Museum, and spend a good deal of my spare time in that appalling library, that ordered chaos from which no cosmos can possibly arrive by any Fiat soever. However, I determined to find out as much as I could about Freemasonry from the "authorities."

Alas!

Alas!!

It took me a very few hours to discover that Waite was as ignorant as he was pompous—and he was very very pompous.

I was nearly led away by Mackey, but discovered in time that his book was a system of deliberate falsification.

John Yarker was learned, accurate, and sincere; but those very qualities made him too cautious to assert what was doubtful. And about Masonry nearly everything is doubtful.

It was hardly encouraging when one afternoon I found a smiling professorial face bending over my shoulder.

"Studying Masonry, my young friend? I am the Grand Master of Germany, and I have studied it these

forty years and more; and I know nothing whatever about it."

He was kind enough, however, to help me considerably with my studies; and I am able to present a rudimentary Synoptic Table of the principal rites.

I can make no pretence to completeness, to historical treatment—indeed, my main purpose is to show the utter impossibility of building a house even of stacked cards on such shifting sand as Masonic History.

I. Common to, and essential to, all Freemasonry soever: The Three "Craft" Degrees.

IA. Swedenborgian Masonry: the 1° - 4°, 2° - 5°, and 3° - 6° explaining the Three Craft Degrees respectively.

IB. Martinism, the Sat Bhai, and similar systems, which attempt to replace the Three Craft Degrees.

IC. The Three First Degrees of O.T.O., which claim to restore the lost meaning of the Three Craft Degrees.

ID. "Clandestine" Masonry; this adjective is applied by any Mason to any other Mason with whom he is not officially allied; though the "Secrets," Rituals, etc., may be identical. It is a question of jurisdiction; a sectarian squabble the rights and wrongs of which probably never existed, and are in any case lost in antiquity and confusion. The reason of this will appear later. Remember only that to a "just, lawful, and regular" English Mason practically all European Masons are anathema marantha.

II. Degrees purporting to give further details with regard to the Second Degree.

IIA. Most of the degrees of the Scottish Rite of 33°, especially the 30°.

IIB. Most of the degrees of the Rites of Memphis and Mizraim, of 97° and 90° respectively. These rites seem to have been mere collections of all known degrees—as a connoisseur might collect bric-a-brac. The 97° is honorary: "Grand Hierophant," the supreme ruler of these (united) rites. Many 96° - 90°'s exist; but they

have never gone through the degrees. There is, however, a Reduced Rite of Memphis of 33° of which the 20° corresponds with the 33° of the Scottish Rite; this is recognised by the Grand Orient of France and other civilised countries.

The 32° of a well-known Rite in America is sold for so many dollars, like canned pork. It even cadges for members. It is an association given overmuch to graft of the most specious kind. Only master "craftsmen" attain the 33°. It is a business, political, anti-Catholic hierarchy, tyrannical and treacherous. Its conduct has made the decent citizen fight shy of even the common Craft Freemason. This is the "Pike" rite, notoriously founded on the absurd forgery of a scoundrelly adventurer named Morin; its opponent, the Cerneace rite, has a legitimate title, from the Duke of Sussex; but its defeat has disgraced it, and its present members are little better than the others.

IIC. Various odd rites of little importance: Mark Mason, Royal Ark Mariner, etc.

IID. The V°, VI°, VII°, VIII°, and IX° of the O.T.O.

III. Degrees which claim to explain, or complete, the Unsolved Mystery of the Third Degree.

Of these the chief is the Royal Arch.

Unfortunately for the student, there are several kinds of Royal Arch degree, one leading out of the Third, the second at the end of a string of degrees so leading, the others dotted about the various rites in picturesque places. This, by the way, is typical of the total confusion of the entire system; there ought to be a Necessary Order in Freemasonry, as there is in Nature. And there is; but the workmen have bungled.

IIIA. The IV° and P.I. degrees of O.T.O., which carry on the true work of the III° to the end of philosophical possibility.

IIIB. The degrees (some of them) leading to Knight Templar and Knight of Malta; the York Rite so called is a mixture of these II and III.

It is amusing to note that an English Freemason can be frightened into any folly by threatening to establish the York Rite; it is similar to that bogey of ecclesiastical dignitaries, Sarum.

The more I looked at my effort the more unsatisfactory did it appear. I have hardly touched upon the various bitterly opposed jurisdictions.

One anecdote may illustrate the situation.

I determined to become a Mason myself. I happened to know that the Chaplain of the British Embassy in Z—— was Past Provincial Grand Organist of a certain English town. He proposed me, found me a seconder, and I was duly initiated, passed, and raised. I was warmly welcomed by numerous English and American visitors to our Lodge; for Z—— is a very great city.

I returned to England some time later, after "passing the chair" in my Lodge, and, wishing to join the Royal Arch, called on its venerable secretary.

I presented my credentials. "O Thou Great Architect of the Universe!" the old man sobbed out in rage, "why dost Thou not wither this impudent imposter with Thy fire from heaven? Sir, begone! You are not a Mason at all! As all the world knows, the people in Z—— are atheists, and live with other men's wives."

I thought this a little hard on my Reverend Father in God my proposer; and I noted that, of course, every singly English or American visitor to our Lodge in Z—— stood in peril of instant and irrevocable expulsion on detection. So I said nothing, but walked to another room in Freemasons' Hall over his head, and took my seat as a Past Master in one of the oldest and most eminent Lodges in London!

Kindly note, furthermore, that when each of those wicked Visitors returned to their own Lodges after their crime, they automatically excommunicated the whole thereof; and as visiting is very common, it may well be doubted whether, on their own showing, there is a sin-

gle "just, lawful, and regular Mason" left alive on the earth!

The above anecdote is exactly true in every detail, and shows one side—only one side—of the morass into which the narrow formalism of the authorities has plunged the Craft.

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Now the Craft is the ABC of Masonry: it would be utterly impossible even to suggest the welter of the other degrees. In England, till a few years ago, a man like the Duke of C— did not dare to "recognise" or even to "tolerate"—

Himself!

He was the head of two divisions of Masonry which were not on speaking terms with each other.

Please do not request an excursion into the dreary realms of the higher degrees, which are, for the most part, more pontifically nonsensical than even the out-of-date and out-of-mind Craft Rituals, with their conflicting practices and vain formalities. Not one Mason—of any degree—in ten thousand has the slightest idea of what the whole weary business is about.

Why then, in the name of King Solomon, should anyone become a Mason? What has that V.W.P. Pres. Brd. G. Pur. got for his thousands—to say nothing of the time he has devoted to attending stupid banquets, and learning by heart the interminable outpourings of—oh yes! of whom?

The answer to this two-headed question is really simple enough.

We ought to cross off the pettier human motives first: love of vanity, of mystery, of display, of make-believe; but the average man in England becomes a Mason for as serious a reason as he becomes a Church

member or a Theosophist; and the average man is usually most abominably disillusioned. (Of course, we must eliminate the political or politico-religious motives which are the rule in France and Italy, and their business correlates in America, where the Christian elements of certain rituals have actually been removed so that Jews might become 33 Degree Masons!)

But back to our average man! He may join the Craft with some idea of fellowship, because it is a tradition in his family to do so, or because he hopes to find in the Secret of the Mysteries something which he does not find in any of the exoteric forms of religion.

How is it that the same Order satisfies—more or less—aspirations so diverse?

We are brought at last face to face with the fundamental problem of the Masonic historian—the Origin of the whole business.

Without any hesitation at all, one may confess that on this critical question nothing is certainly known. It is true, indeed, that the Craft Lodges in England were originally Hanoverian Clubs, as the Scottish Lodges were Jacobite Clubs, and the Egyptian Lodges of Cagliostro revolutionary Clubs.

But that no more explains the Origin of Freemasonry than the fact "Many Spaniards are Roman Catholics" explains why the priest says and does certain things rather than others in the Mass.

Now here is the tremendous question: we can admit all Mr. Yarker's contentions, and more, as to the connection of Masonic and quasi-Masonic Rites with the old customs of initiating people into the Trade Guilds; but why should such a matter be hedged about with so severe a wardenship, and why should the Central Sacrament partake of so awful and so unearthly a character?

As Freemasonry has been "exposed" every few minutes for the last century or so, and as any layman can walk into a Masonic shop and buy the complete Rituals for a few pence, the only omissions being of no impor-

tance to our present point, it would be imbecile to pretend that the nature of the ceremonies of Craft Masonry is in any sense a "mystery."

There is therefore no reason for refraining from the plain statement that, to anyone who understands the rudiments of Symbolism, the Master's Degree is identical with the Mass. This is in fact the real reason for the Papal Anathema; for Freemasonry asserts that every man is himself the living, slain, and re-risen Christ in his own person.

It is true that not one Mason in 10,000 in England is aware of this fact; but he has only to remember his "raising" to realise the fundamental truth of the statement.

Well may Catholic and Freemason alike stand appalled at the stupendous blasphemy which is implied, as they ignorantly think, not knowing themselves of the stuff and substance of the Supreme Self, each for himself alike no less than Very God of Very God!

But suppose that the sublimity of this conception is accepted, the identity admitted: what sudden overwhelming billow from the past blasts their beatitude? What but the words with which Freud concludes *Totem and Taboo*: In the Beginning was the Deed!

For the "sacrifice of the Innocent" celebrated alike in Lodge and in Cathedral is this identical Murder of the Master by the Fellow-Craftsmen, that is of the Father by his Sons, when the ape-system of the "Father-horde" was replaced by the tribal system which developed into the "military clan"!

As against all the above, it may be objected that Freemasonry actually poses the perennial problem: If a man die, shall he live again?

We can ignore antiquity, with a mere note that the impossibility of tracing the origin of the Rite makes it impossible to argue that any given jurisdiction is "lawful." As in other matters, the Rite in Might is the Rite in Right! The quarrels which disgrace Freemasonry are only

distinguishable by superior pettiness from such questions as the validity of Anglican Orders.

And it may be added that at this time of day it is abjectly ridiculous to continue the celebration of such totemistic tomfoolery with such tetanic tabus!

The W.M. elect of a certain lodge not far from the birth-place of Daylight Saving used to learn his part by saying it over to his wife in bed. Reproached by brother Masons, he replied quite calmly that the Secret of Freemasonry was lost, and therefore he could not disclose it if he would!

But is the Secret lost?

Does not the insistence on so many senseless formalities lead us to surmise that the Secret may have been locked away not in the ostensible words, grips, signs, tokens, et cetera, which are for the most part self-stultifying, but in the essential structure of the Rite?

We can here merely refer to a rare and long since out of print volume, *The Canon*, which shows that the proportions of certain fabulous or imaginary structures testify to certain philosophical truths according to a symbolic system.

The truth is—to speak plainly—that the Secret was lost, and is found.

But those to whom it has been communicated, whatever their degree, are not in the least likely to spread it broadcast before undiscerning Masons.

Their condition is therefore, reasonably enough, that the whole unwieldy system of pompous and meaningless formalities, with their outworn and misunderstood verbiage, their sectarian accretions, and their manifold confusion, should be swept away entirely. It is better so than that Masonry should stumble into the open sewer of obsolescence, as it is doing now.

While no two jurisdictions can agree to recognise or tolerate the existence of any third, while women are clamouring for admission on the one hand and men despairingly dropping it on the other, while clandestine

lodges already almost outnumber the regular kind—what is worth saving?

What was ever worth saving in Masonry? What was the original idea of the institution as such? The Secret and its Preservation.

Even at this, the Secret pertains to the Past. It is part of the heritage of Humanity. But the Rites of Freemasonry are after all those of Osiris, of the Dying God; the Aeon of Horus, of the Crowned and Conquering Child, is come; it is His rites that we should celebrate, His that liveth and reigneth, and hath His abode in every human heart!