

Thursday 30th October, 1947.

W. M. M. M.
"A COURSE OF MASONIC READING".

*Read at
Worcester. His Study @, Worcester
on 31/3/69.*

Chapman
W. Bro. Instructor & Brethren,

I do not pretend that what I have set down here is exhaustive, or that I profess to expert knowledge of the subject. The bibliography of Freemasonry is so great and so varied that I doubt if any member of the Order could lay claim to a comprehensive knowledge of all its branches. A visit to the Library at Grand Lodge, or even our own Prov. Library at Worcester, will afford a convincing proof of the accuracy of that statement.

Before I embark on my subject I must confess to some uneasiness in regard to the title of this little paper - "Suggestions for Masonic Reading" would have been far less pretentious and far more in accord with my standard of learning. However, Bro. Sec. chose (by suggestion) the title and I will do my best to comply with your wishes, which albeit flatter me, nevertheless give me much pleasure.

And now to my subject:-

(1) HISTORY.

In order that we may in some measure comprehend the subject of Freemasonry as a whole, a knowledge of its history is requisite that we "may the better be enabled to distinguish and appreciate the connection of our whole system and the relative dependency of its several parts".

The best known and still the most comprehensive is W. Bro. R. F. Gould's "History of Freemasonry" *revised by W. Br. Rev. H. Poole in* It consists of three volumes each of 500 pages wherein he traces the origins and roots of the Craft. He considers the possible connection and influence of the Essenes (a strict religious sect of Jews), the Roman Collegia (or college - associations or guilds of men bound by some common tie e.g. masons, goldsmiths, musicians, tanners, potters, and dyers) and the Culdees (origin very uncertain but known to have existed in Scotland and Ireland long before 600 A.D)!. He also indicates many striking similarities between the German Steinmetzen (stonemasons) and the Compagnonage of France with the system of Freemasonry as we know it to-day in this and many other parts of the world.

1. "Freemasonry Pocket Reference Book" by Peck & Knight 3rd edn. 1958.

The remainder of this great work is taken up with a critical review of Early British Freemasonry prior to 1717 (Formation of ^{the first} G.L) and the history of its spread over the four quarters of the globe.

It is, without doubt, a monumental work, and still (as I have said) the most comprehensive. It is not, however, what one would term a "bedside book" and for those who are not overburdened with leisure but yet are interested and would know more Bro. Gould later wrote a "Concise History of Freemasonry".

In 1946 W. Bro. A.F. Dence published a book entitled "A Short History of English Freemasonry" (A. Lewis, 30/32, Flax Street, London, E.C. 4 - 9/-) which is ⁱⁿ every respect an excellent little work. He sets out to shew that the literal interpretation of Masonic legend cannot now be held to be correct and in his Introduction says:-

"Just as building was one of the earliest acts of man and one which resulted in mental satisfaction in proportion to the effort and skill which was expended, so Masonry has resulted from a primeval urge in men whose minds were directed towards the Mystical to form themselves into groups to study and contemplate together this or that aspect of the Moral and Spiritual life.

Their researches have led them along very diverse paths; but often these paths have converged, and as the process has now gone on for many hundreds of years some of the various threads have become woven into a splendid pattern which we call Freemasonry.

The origin of the existing design does not lie in any of the threads, but without each one it would probably be incomplete.

I have set against a background of history some of the influences which have in the course of time contributed to the framework of our great Masonic Organisation"

In any case, whatever line of thought we adopt on this subject I submit that a knowledge of the legendary beginnings and subsequent history of the Craft is essential if our ceremonies are to be appreciated in their true perspective.

Since 1813 the year in which the "Modern" & "Ancient" Lodges were amalgamated, Freemasonry has grown by leaps and bounds. That year saw Freemasonry welded into a "regularly organised Society", and like all sound institutions has its book of rules, which leads to the next subject, viz:-

(2) MASONIC LAW.

First and foremost, of course, is the Book of Constitutions, a good knowledge of which is essential in every candidate for the Master's Chair. Every Candidate after Initiation is (or should be) presented with a copy wherein he will be enabled firstly to read the "Charges of a Freemason" and secondly to study the "General Laws and Regulations for the Government of the Craft". Although it may be perfectly true that there is scarcely a case of difficulty can occur in the Lodge in which that book will not set us right, it is equally likely that the less knowledgeable among us may experience some difficulty in tracing a solution to a problem. W. Bro. Lewis Edwards (a Barrister by profession) has written an excellent book entitled, ^{in "RULES TEACH" (1936)} "The Law & Customs of Freemasonry" ⁽¹⁹³⁸⁾. This book may be said to be an interpretation of all that the Book of Constitutions contains. The B. of C. makes two references (Rules 4 & 55) to the Ancient Landmarks of the Order, but does not specify what they are. Various attempts have been made both in this country and in America to define them, the most noteworthy being that of Bro. Dr. Mackey (an eminent American Mason). The English Grand Lodge on the other hand has never attempted to define these Landmarks completely, but Bro. Edwards points out that several of the Landmarks are contained "either in fact or essence" in the Ancient Charges. He reproduces the list as given by Bro. Dr. Mackey and then makes the following comment:-

"There runs through Roman jurisprudence the idea that there are certain rules and laws of nature which perhaps never existed in their purity, but to which all legal systems which claim any authority must gradually endeavour to approximate. Certain causes - temporary, when we read the whole cycle of civilization - may overlay these - may for a time justify their abeyance - e.g. a condition of slavery may be necessary for a time - but every legal system will seek gradually to eliminate anything contrary to the Law of Nature, and when the temporary causes have ceased to exist will allow it full play. In time the theory of the Law of Nature became merged in or confounded with that of the Law of Nations. The Roman law-makers began to perceive that there were certain rules and laws which were at once common to their own system and to those of the nations with whom they were brought into contact, and it seemed to them that these principles on which nations differing in history, religion and state of civilization agreed, must on that account be the dictates of the Law of Nature. Hence arose the theory of an ideal

system of law, nowhere expressly or fully enunciated to which state-made law should endeavour to approximate. Whatever the historical justification of the theory, its practical service in rendering more humane and more simple artificial codes of law cannot be denied. It performs in the fields of jurisprudence the function fulfilled by a religious system in the domain of conduct

It is perhaps not fanciful to see in the doctrine of the Landmarks of Freemasonry a valuable analogy to the idea of the Law of Nature and of Nations. The Landmarks are traditional and time-honoured; they are universally prevalent; they at once command respect by their consonance with the dictates of the conscience of all men; they are clear in principle but vague in detail. All these, it seems to us, are characteristics common to the ideal system of law ----- . And it is a useful theory. It justifies the age-long reluctance of G.L. to formulate the Landmarks, while it allows it to use them as the touchstone of the proposed reforms.

On the other hand it is not inconsistent with the unofficial attempts in this country and the official attempts in the U.S. to formulate lists of commonly recognized legal principles It gives to the Landmarks the sanction of universality and of age, and while it preserves them in an almost historic seclusion, it permits them descent into the common light of day on those occasions when their presence may make the dark places light and enable their disciples to distinguish between Masonic right and wrong".

I have quoted from Bro. Edwards' book at some length and make no apology for doing so since the subject goes to the root and being of the Craft. However, having considered the historical and governmental aspects it is time to turn to the "mechanism" or

(3) RITUAL OF FREEMASONRY.

And here we are well served by quite a goodly collection of so-called "drill books".

My personal opinion, for what it is worth, is that by far the best is Bro. H. F. Inman's "Emulation-working explained". Bro. Inman ^{was} a past member of the Committee of the Emulation Lodge of Improvement among other distinguished qualifications. His book, as the title indicates, deals exclusively with "Emulation-working" and, as we ^{in this Province} of the Silver Jubilee Lodge conform, with minor exceptions, to that working, the directions and suggestions contained therein are invaluable. For those Brethren who are R.A. Masons Bro. Inman has written a companion volume dealing on similar lines with that Order. The former volume first explains what Emulation-working means and how it came into being, and goes on to comment on and compare other "workings" which differ from Emulation. Part 2 of the book treats of the functions of each officer of the Lodge in

great detail - detail which is not apparent in our rituals.

Another work, which I would with respect call a "good all rounder" is W.Bro. W.P. Campbell-Everdon's "Freemasonry and its Etiquette".

A selection of some of the chapter headings will clarify my "good all rounder" expression:-

1. What is Freemasonry?
2. Grand Lodge & Grand Orients.
3. Board of Benevolence.
10. Who are fit and proper persons to be made Masons?
14. Ritual.
16. A Lodge and its furniture.
18. Etiquette of dress and jewels.
19. The ceremonies.
25. The Festive Board, Speeches, etc.
26. The Royal Masonic Institutions.
31. Lodges of Research.
32. Operative Masonry.
33. The Supreme G. Council of the 33 D^o.

This book has the effect of making us want to find out and know more of the various subjects treated.

A work which might be said to supplement the last two mentioned is W.Bro. J.S.M. Vail's "The Masonic Why & Wherefore", He deals with the history and symbolism of the three Craft Degrees and makes plain the reasons why certain actions are performed, and how they were derived from ancient sources. To give you a clearer picture I have taken five extracts from his little book which I now propose to read:-

- (1) I. 8. No. 7 - 1st D. ✓
- (2) P.26. No.22 - 2nd D. ✓
- (3) P.49. No.47 - 3rd D. ✓
- (4) P.73. No.67 - General Problems. ✓
- (5) P.87. No.83 - Historical * ✓

Lastly under the heading of "Ritual" I would draw attention to the "Nigerian Ritual". In effect it is precisely the same as our own pocket ritual save that the rubric has been considerably extended where necessary. It was produced primarily for use ~~by~~ ^{for} our overseas Brethren who, because of the vast distances separating Lodges were, and still are, unable to attend Lodges of Instruction. Prefacing each Degree are admirable explanatory notes and useful tips.

Another fascinating subject is of course:-

(4) BIOGRAPHY.

And here I cannot do better than to direct your attention to W. Bro. Sadler's very readable "Life of Thomas Dunckerley". T.D. was a very remarkable and talented man who while a naval officer did more to spread the cause of Freemasonry into the New World than any before or perhaps since. On retirement from the R.N. he set about organising Freemasonry in England with great success. In the later years of his life he was simultaneously Prov. G.M. of no less than seven Provinces, viz:-

Hampshire.
Essex.
Bristol.
Dorsetshire.
Gloucestershire, and
Herefordshire.

In the R.A. and other Degrees his career was as zealous and distinguished as in the Craft.

In 1934 W. Bro. H.S. Baurer published a book containing biographical sketches of:-

Bro. William Hogarth (1697 - 1764)
Rt. W. Bro. Benjamin Franklin (1706 - 1790)
Bro. Wolfgang Mozart (1756 - 1791).
" Robt. Burns (1759 - 1796)
W. Bro. Sir Stamford Raffles (1781 - 1826)
Bro. Sir Walter Scott (1771 - 1832)
Rt. W. Bro. Lord Bitchener (1850 - 1916)
Rt. W. Bro. King Edward VII (1841 - 1910).

Turning from the particular to the general under the heading

(5) MISCELLANEOUS.

I would first mention the "Medal Catalogue" compiled by W. Bro. The Rev. H. Poole relating to the collection in the Worc. Library and Museum - a study of which will prove very worth while.

Bro. Inman (author of "Emulation Working Explained") has recently published a very handy and informative book which he styles "Masonic Problems and Queries". He ranges over a vast field, and in short paragraphs solves some of those problems, sometimes only half-formed in the minds of young Masons, by which we are all at some time or other beset. For instance he poses such questions as:-

"Why is the idea of a goat sometimes associated with Freemasonry"?

And answers it as follows:-

"In ancient symbolism the goat often typified all that was evil. Among the Greeks and the Romans the god Pan was depicted as half goat, signifying that nature was half evil. The enemies of Freemasonry originated the idea that the Candidate "rode the goat" - meaning the devil".

I cannot conclude these brief observations without making mention of the admirable facilities for Masonic education afforded by the various Lodges of Research - the best known of course are:-

- (1) The Quatuor Coronati No. 2076. (Four Crowned Martyrs).
- (2) The Manchester L. for Masonic Research No. 552.
- (3) The Leicester L. of Research.

One may become a member of the Correspondence Circle of any or all of these Lodges for a nominal annual subscription, which entitles such members to a copy of the Transactions (issued annually) and the right to attend any of their respective meetings.

Lest it should be suspected that I have financial interests in any of the publishing houses let me add in conclusion that all the books I have mentioned and many more besides are numbered among the collection of the Prov. Library, Worcester, and may be borrowed free of charge.

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Separate list of books.