

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

When speculative masonry became established during the seventeenth century and, in the early eighteenth century opened its lodges to non Christians, it was the signal for the sudden expansion of Masonic Orders and Degrees which lasted from the first quarter of the eighteenth century until the middle of the nineteenth. Coincident with this was the beginning of the wide dissemination of Craft Masonry and the other newly founded Orders into almost every part of the World.

During the whole of this period new orders Rites and Degrees with some of which many of us are familiar were continually springing up in Europe while others such as the order of Hizraim with its 90 degrees have mercifully been forgotten as the expansive period passed. How these new formations came into being is by no means clear though it seems fairly certain that the majority originated in France. Undoubtedly it must have been assisted by the prevailing hunger for ceremonial, deeper research into the mysteries and for higher masonic honours; indeed it must have taxed the ingenuity and somewhat vague historical knowledge of some of our masonic predecessors to find new and original aspects wherewith to clothe their new degrees. I personally, am very dubious of the theories which postulate a very ancient genesis for the "outside" degrees though more distinguished brethren than I still hold firmly to beliefs which clothe them with the glamour of the Seven Hills of Rome or the prestige of the Crusades.

On the other hand there is much to be said for the very plausible theory expounded by M. . . . Brother R. S. Lindsay 33^o, the Grand Secretary General for Scotland that "Scottish Rite" or Ecosaise Masonry, which demonstrably had really nothing to do with Scotland, was established in France, and was a politico-Masonic movement, deliberately started by those in high masonic positions in Paris to counteract the growing danger of the spread of English Masonry in that Country.

In 1740 the possibility of the "Masonic Colonisation" of France by two flourishing and powerful Grand Lodges in England with a long history behind them was a serious matter. Many English Lodges had already sprung up and their influence was spreading.

Other factors were moving towards a more national masonry in France. The first step came when the French Lodges set up their own Grand Lodge in 1736. But it seems probable that the leaders of French Masonry were already formulating a plan to go one better than our Grand Lodge and produce something that to the Gallic mind would have such an appeal as to overcome the English influence. The ideal ingredients of such a formation are easily recognised now and attractive degrees with important and high sounding titles, Knight, Prince, King and Emperor, the rediscovery of what had been lost, and an historical background which would go so far back into the past that it could link up with Royal Solomon himself and so overcome the admitted antiquity of the English order.

About this time there comes upon the masonic scene a rather romantic character known as The Chevalier de Ramsay. It has been a popular belief among some masons that he was in fact the founder of the Scottish Rite, in fact there is absolutely no evidence of this. At any rate he proved he was highly intelligent; he graduated at Edinburgh University and after a time fighting as an officer under Marlborough, he took up teaching and was in 1729 elected a Fellow of The Royal Society. He was an erudite, mild and kindly man, he was certainly honest and genuine, and it seems most improbable that had he been the Founder of the Ecosais Masonry he would have made no mention of it in his writings.

The sole contemporary evidence for the legend that he invented the Scottish Rite is his famous oration delivered to what were evidently prospective masons, probably men of high station, in Paris in 1737. The fact that he became Grand Chancellor of the Grand Lodge of France in 1743 cannot be held as confirmation of the story because the "Lodges Ecosaises" had barely begun at that time and it is far more probable that the whole scheme for the new French system had been secretly formulated before his meeting in Paris and that this oration gave the idea for the pattern of the movement to its instigators.

For those who may not know the substance of Ramsay's oration it should be noted that he was a man many years in advance of his time, a believer in universal brotherhood and he began his speech by pointing out that Masonry was the first great influence for universal brotherhood since the days of the Crusades. He went on to trace its descent from the Crusaders and pointed out that they obtained their secrets from descendants of the Antient builders of The Temple themselves.

He claimed that the Crusaders fleeing from their persecutors had established themselves in England under the name of Freemasons, whence in his own time they were being re-established in France which was destined to become the centre of the order.

Here indeed for those who were looking for a new angle to combat English influence, was an ideal start. Masonry could have descended from Rome herself after the destruction of The Temple in 70 A.D., thence to the Crusaders and after their suppression, could have been handed down by the secretly initiated to their own time. Furthermore there was a much venerated Lodge in a small place called Kilwinning which, having lost all its early records, unlike the Lodge of Edinburgh which had records going back to 1599, could have any fable fathered onto it. Scotland had been France's hereditary friend, the Church which in 1737 was strongly against deistic masonry might well favour a Christian variety - "La Macconerie Ecosaises", founded on Ramsay's suggestions, was undoubtedly what they sought.

By 1732 an English Lodge had appeared in Bordeaux and a second followed it in 1740.

Probably by the efforts of Steven Morin, a wine merchant from San Domingo in the West Indies who was resident in Bordeaux at the time, a third non English but Ecosais Lodge was started three years after that in 1743 and soon absorbed the second English Lodge.

This new Lodge practised the emerging "Scottish Rite" though we are not told how they knew about it, which then had seven degrees of Perfection including the three Craft Degrees.

Eight years later they had increased these seven to fourteen degrees of Perfection, and over the next ten years, by 1762, had developed those fourteen to twenty five, right up to Prince of the Royal Secret.

During those ten years Steven Morin had moved his wine merchants business from Bordeaux to Paris where he was instrumental in forming Lodges working all the degrees up to the 25th of the Rite. Finally in that year, 1762, a "Sovereign Grand Council of Princes of the Royal Secret" was formed in Paris and Constitutions of the Rite were drawn up, copies of which, allegedly authentic, are in existence today.

The battle for supremacy between the Sovereign Grand Council and the Grand Lodge of France, too complex to go into here, caused such scenes in the Grand Lodge that Louis XV closed the Grand Lodge for three years in 1768.

Steven Morin's business in San Domingo had flourished in spite of his absence and he decided to return. He took with him a Patent from the Sovereign Grand Council to spread all the 25 degrees throughout the West Indies.

From the short account in the intermediate Degree Resume we all know the subsequent history of the West Indies, the advent of de Grasse-Tilly and his association with Francken who collected the degrees we now use up to the 25^o in one manuscript. It was de Grasse-Tilly who, with Delahogue formed the Supreme Council of the United States of America at Charleston in 1801. We can therefore turn to Europe and particularly Great Britain, to see the further progress of Masonic evolution.

Many of the Ecosais degrees had crossed the Channel by 1785, and were being widely practised in all three countries of the British Isles. Ireland had already been in communication with Charleston as early as 1809 with a view to obtaining a Charter for a Supreme Grand Council, and by 1811 all was ready to receive it. At that time however, the war of 1812 broke out and matters were delayed until 1823. Letters Patent were eventually received from the Southern Jurisdiction U.S.A. in 1824 constituting the Supreme Council of Ireland under the leadership of the Duke of Leinster, John Fowler, and Thomas McGill.

This apparently auspicious beginning was in fact the prelude to over eighty years of Masonic rivalry and bickering for the Rose Croix degree had already been appropriated in Ireland by a Grand Supreme Council" which held it had a right to work still higher degrees than the 18th. This Council continued until 1832 when, under a French warrant it was formed into a "Metropolitan College of Heredom Ireland" with John Fowler as its Grand Commander and it was not until 1905 that friendly arrangement was at last entered into and this body, which had suffered several changes of name by then, came under the Supreme Council for Ireland.

Meanwhile in France a Supreme Council had been formed by Count de Grasse-Tilly, who had returned from Charleston with his 33^o Rite as early as 1804. He later founded Councils for Italy (1805), Spain (1809) and Belgium (1817).

England had joined the race for a Supreme Council as early as 1819 and there is good reason to believe that a patent from the Supreme Council of France dated 13th October of that year had been granted to the Duke of Sussex, Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge, for the establishment of a Supreme Council for Great Britain, Ireland and its possession in America and the Indies. The Duke of Leinster, Grand Master of Ireland, was mentioned as a member, as was da Costa P.G.M. of Rutland. The Patent was in order and signed by J. de Glock-d'Obernay, Sov. Gd. Cmr. of France, le Duc d'Aumont, le Comte Decazes, le Duc de Tarente, Baron de Margarettas, le Marquis de Messaic and others.

The text of this patent has been published by the Grand Lodge of France and this story is borne out by some correspondence in the possession of the Irish Supreme Council. There is also a box of seals of the Supreme Council of France which was obtained after the Duke of Sussex died and may have been sent over for copying. At the time of the Patent the Supreme Council for France had been dormant for about four years although it was revived shortly afterwards and it may be that the Duke of Sussex suspected its legitimacy.

It is a fact however that the Duke did nothing more in the matter and it was therefore not until two years after the Duke's death in 1843 that a Supreme Council could be formed in England. The Patent is dated 13th October 1845, so 26 years had in effect been wasted.

The Patent was sent by the Grand Commander of the Supreme Council for the Northern Jurisdiction U.S.A. which had been constituted in New York in 1813 by the Supreme Council in Charleston.

Dr. R. T. Crucifix	was appointed	Sov. Gd. Commander
Rev George Cleve	" " " "	Lt. Gd. Commander
Henry Udall	" " " "	Grand Treasurer General
Henry Leeson	" " " "	Grand Chancellor
Dafyd Nash	" " " "	Grand Secretary General
Richard Wilson	" " " "	Grand Master of Ceremonies
and Thomas Pryor	" " " "	Captain of Life Guards

and they, together with William Tucker formed our first Supreme Council.

Almost immediately trouble started. Dr Crucifix (Sov. Gd. Cdr.) opened relations with the Grand Orient of France which had absorbed one branch of his A. & A. Scottish Rite and Leeson (Grand Chancellor) actually visited that body. This resulted in a quarrel with their Mother Supreme Council - the Northern Jurisdiction U.S.A. - which did not recognise the Grand Orient of France, culminating in a to recognise us from 1847 until 1850 or 1851 after Crucifix had died.

In 1856 Henry Udall, the Grand Treasurer General was dismissed owing to his neglect of the Council Accounts and two years later, in 1858, the Grand Secretary General, Dafyd Nash, was expelled from the order. He had not only continued to attend meetings of Baldwin and Antiquity which were not under the the Council's banner, but to be a member of the Order of Hizraim and other strange and unrecognised bodies. He was also guilty of allowing 30⁰ meetings to be held without the Supreme Councils permission.

He had retired to Bristol and taken the Minute Book with him. This has never been recovered or traced. Our first minutes therefore began in 1854, nine years after the Patent was granted.

A new Secretary, Cox, had been appointed in 1857 but he resigned in 1861 after great difficulty had been experienced in recovering the Councils property which had been in his possession.

"Antiquity" in Bath joined the Supreme Council in 1866 but in 1870 their Warrant was suspended - in fact, 1870 and 1871, were years of constant trouble.

Encampments of Knights Templar which worked the 18th^o and sometimes other higher degrees were disinclined to join the Supreme Council and some Preceptories even carried out unrecognised Rites and Degrees as well.

Scotland at this time quarrelled with our Supreme Council, a rift which was not healed for many years, until 1889 in fact.

In 1868, the first Chapters under England were established in Canada and six years later they were granted a Supreme Council Warrant. They then had about ten Chapters. In 1871, Chile was granted a Warrant by us but later their Supreme Council faded out. Thus the oldest living child is Canada and it seems probable that our second may be Finland.

The whole question of the "legality" of Supreme Councils was founded on the Grand Constitutions of 1786. The Constitutions of the original A. & A. Scottish Rite originally formulated in Bordeaux in 1782 had been suitable for the 25 degrees of the Ecossais Rite but the 33 degree Constitutions agreed by de Grasse-Tilly in 1804 for the various Supreme Councils which he formed were clearly founded on some other document.

In 1834 there appeared the set of Grand Constitutions dated 1786, and purporting to have been laid down and signed by Frederick the Great as Grand Patron of the Order. Today these Constitutions have been accepted by all the Supreme Councils as the Foundation on which their Rules and Regulations are based but not without a great deal of attack and defence over many years, it having been suggested in some quarters that they are entirely spurious.

Albert Pike, the great 19th Century leader of American Masonry defended them powerfully and they are consequently now accepted and usually admitted as of authentic date, though the connection with Frederick the Great is regarded as dubious.

In May 1873, a beginning was made in forming Districts under Inspectors General. At first, there were three, the South Western, Western and Northern. In 1874 the Prince of Wales took a 33^o and became Grand Patron of the Order.

In 1878 the 33^o was conferred upon the Duke of Connaught and Prince Leopold in the presence of the Prince of Wales, the first time in history that all three had been together at a Masonic gathering. But as things became smoother at home and in our colonies and dominions, trouble broke out in Europe.

The Congress of Supreme Councils held at Lausanne and attended by our delegates, instead of making for union among the various Councils attending caused dissension and disagreement and the Southern Jurisdiction U.S.A., Scotland and Ireland together with Greece, broke away and even considered forming a league of their own.

These were not the only difficulties and disappointments experienced with other Supreme Councils outside those of the English speaking peoples and consequently we are slow to recognise new bodies because we feel that they must conform to a very high standard and many have failed to keep the 18^o as a Christian Rite.

Now however I can say with confidence that our Supreme Council is respected throughout the World and our recognition is constantly being sought though it is very seldom given.

Thus in the complex and stormy formative years of "Masonic evolution" and the scramble for new degrees, the Christian Orders of Masonry seem to have forgotten Charity, the basic principle of all our beliefs. Much of the history behind those years is dubious or disputed; some of the formations had been at war for a number of years, but by the end of the last century, most of the great Christian orders had crystallised into strong foundations, able to settle their disagreements when they arose in the light of true Christian principles. Today our three British Supreme Councils are, I am glad to say, in complete amity and may God grant that this happy state may long continue.