

Provincial Grand Chapter, Warwickshire



# An Oration

DELIVERED BY

Exc. Comp. C. J. FOWLER, Prov. G. J.,

AT THE

## Consecration

OF THE

Henton Chapter, No. 3484,

AT THE

CHURCH HOUSE, ERDINGTON,

THURSDAY, FEB. 27th, 1919.

What do we know about Freemasonry?

To many minds the origin of the Order is associated with the extensive building operations carried on in connection with the wonderful Temple erected at Jerusalem during the reign of King Solomon, around which are bound so many traditions of the Craft.

A Grand Lodge was held then, at which were gathered together leaders of all the Tribes of Israel, representing Operative as well as what we now term Speculative Masonry.

But in the R.A. Degree we learn that this is known as the second of the original Grand Lodges of History, the first officially recorded having been held some four or five centuries earlier ; but no claim is made of this being the beginning of the Order.

This was an age when little documentary evidence was forthcoming, and of which, probably, the history was subsequently compiled from oral tradition.

Few men were able to produce anything in the nature of writing, therefore the oral method of continuity was carefully cultivated, particularly among those who, for various reasons, had special knowledge to transmit to posterity. Therefore, oral tradition must be regarded as fairly admissible, and, if subsequently reduced to writing, may be accepted with a certain amount of assurance.

From the earliest ages men have banded together in unity as a recognised form of strength, and wise men, priests and philosophers **have** availed themselves of temporary or permanent unions to promulgate their principles, good or bad.

And some form of religious observance has been practised alongside with human occupations from the beginning of time.

As civilisation grew, Religion characterised the manners and influenced the morals of civil society, but when Idolatry became pre-eminent in any country, the true worship of the Almighty was perverted until nothing remained.

The Ancients had several institutions for the cultivation of knowledge, doctrinal and ritual, the mysteries of which were usually committed to priests. Amongst the nations which retained a pure worship of a Supreme Being the Hebrews take a leading rank, and it is from these people that we obtain our earliest traditions of Masonry.

During the Israelites' sojourn in Egypt, where, undoubtedly, they absorbed much of the skill and learning of the Egyptians, who were a highly-cultured people, they were employed extensively in the erection of buildings of all kinds and came to be regarded as experts in the science of operative architecture.

Joseph, who excelled in this science, is recorded as having been appointed to the supreme government of these operative Masons, and may be regarded as their Grand Master.

He divided them into Lodges, and placed over each an expert Master. Over the whole he appointed eminent and skilful architects, reserving to himself the general direction of the works.

Upon their escape from bondage the Israelites carried their principles and knowledge with them into the Wilderness, where Moses modelled Masonry into a perfect system and circumscribed its mysteries by landmarks so significant and unalterable that from him its transmission was little liable to perversion or error.

The knowledge the Israelites had acquired was fully displayed in the Wilderness by the construction of a Tabernacle for Divine Worship, under the direction of Aholiab and Bezaleel, who were two of the eminent presiding Architects chosen for the Tabernacle.

The position was particularly appropriate as Mount Horeb, by an ancient tradition, was considered the peculiar residence of God on earth, and therefore regarded by the inhabitants of the country with a high degree of reverence.

Here He was revealed to His faithful servant Moses, who congregated together the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel in a Grand Lodge to commemorate the completion of this sacred Tabernacle to the honour and glory of the Most High.

Before this period service of divine worship was performed on altars erected in the open air, of the construction of which many instances are recorded in the Scriptures.

We may reasonably assume that the best traditions of Masonry were passed on from generation to generation until the period of that second G.L. of which we have already spoken, when they were further developed in various directions.

Now, to what end do these unions and teachings lead us?

The great end and design of Masonry is to make men virtuous and happy by the inculcation of moral precepts, enforced by the most engaging consideration that can be presented to the mind.

The medium of instruction used by our ancient brethren was by visible symbols, in which precepts of morality were curiously unfolded and veiled from common observance.

Those who had been initiated into this symbolic institution were declared Free, that is, exempted from all taxes, duties, and contributions to the service of the State, and became what is known as *accepted*.

This Medium of Instruction is still preserved among Free and Accepted Masons, and by the symbolic use of our working tools, &c., we are reminded of many desirable virtues.

But something more is required than the mere forms of initiation to constitute a good Mason.

We do not continue to practise operative masonry, neither do we meet together merely for pleasant social intercourse, to enjoy meals in good company, and to listen to seductive music.

It is our peculiar province to make a practical application of the excellent principles in which we are instructed, to the common round of everyday life, say, for instance, to endeavour to act up to the F.P.O.F.

A brief definition of even these would be sufficient for a long talk, but take the first, Brotherly Love.

Do we really understand and practice this? Do we always behave in a brotherly way to one whom we think is not in quite such good circumstances as ourselves?

Or, say, one who ventures to seek our assistance in the words of the initiation ceremony, reminding us of the conditions of our own admission to the Order.

Brotherly action in such a case does not mean merely to drop sixpence in his hand and pass on with a smothered ejaculation of impatience at the inopportune interruption to our progress.

It does not mean voting him a guinea from the charity box and thinking how foolish he is to get into such a position.

It means sympathy, taking him by the hand, and encouraging him to further efforts to rise above his distressing circumstances, to help him to help himself, and to realise the benefit of human fellowship as a supplement to the indispensable aid of the Divine.

Or take the last of the F.P.O.F. To preserve a Brother's character in his absence. Not to magnify his careless words into something suggestive of evil never contemplated. Not to repeat that little whisper we heard about his shortcomings. Not to listen to the slightest breath of slander concerning him. In short, to treat him as we would like to be treated ourselves in all circumstances.

These are some of the things we as Masons are expected to consider as the "Nature and Purpose of our Order." That we should show to the world in our daily life something of the practise of those exalted principles we profess to admire, and to show each other in our generation that we are not simply in love with a system but firmly intend to act up to the standard of morality of which we preach.

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