

The Church's Debt To Freemasonry

by
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GREAT interest is being aroused as to the history of our National Church, and much information will doubtless be gained by those who witness the English Church Pageant, to be held in the grounds of Fulham Palace, commencing to-morrow (10th June, 1909).

The compiler of the excellent Pageant Book says "A really good and complete History of the Church of England has yet to be written." My subject is-the relation of the Church to Freemasonry, and I shall endeavour to shew that the Church is indebted, in a large measure, to Freemasonry for the position she occupies to-day.

There is a tradition very difficult to disprove; but one to which I give allegiance-that Christianity was introduced into Britain by Joseph of Arimathaea, A.D. 36-39, followed by Simon Zelotes, the Apostle; then by Aristobulus, the first Bishop of the Britons, and afterwards by St. Paul, so that Britain was the first country in Europe to receive the Gospel, and the British Church is the most ancient of the Churches of Christ.

I think we may regard our information as definite from the commencement of the third century. In the fourth century we have the somewhat shadowy and legendary figure of St. Alban, the first of a long line of British martyrs. The Church at Silchester, the foundations of which have recently been uncovered, is about this date.

On the assumption of the Papacy by Rome, A.D. 606, this great Celtic Church, which had previously been in full communion with Rome, refused in the most peremptory

terms to acknowledge her novel pretensions. It is the primitive British Church and not the Roman Church introduced by Augustine into Kent among the Pagan Saxons, A.D. 596, for which we claim priority.

Regarding the *buildings* - have you ever thought of the reason why there is such a similarity of design in the Cathedrals and Monastic structures of England, France, Germany, Italy, and even farther East, for at least a thousand years, say from the sixth to the sixteenth centuries ? Is not the answer-that the Comacine Masters form a perfect link between the old and the new, and wherever they went they spread fraternity. When they began building in any new place, there they generally founded a lodge.

Several present are members of the Correspondence Circle of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge. A Lodge which has taken its name from the four holy crowned ones who were the patron saints of the Comacine Masters. In the persecution under Diocletian these four brothers of the same lodge, Nicostratus, Claudius, Castorio, and Superian, were martyred because they said they could not " build a temple for false gods, nor shape images in wood or stone to ensnare the souls of others."

For much valuable information connecting Comacine Masters as a connecting link between the classic collegia and all other trade guilds of the Middle Ages I am indebted to Leader Scott (Mrs. Baxter, daughter of our own Dorset poet, the Rev. William Barnes) in Cathedral Builders, and to the Rev. William Miles Bridge on the origin of Saxon Architecture.

The Comacine Masters were called Freemasons because they were builders of a

privileged class, absolved from taxes and servitude, and free to travel in times of feudal bondage.

An Italian writer in *Storia di Como* says, "Our Como architects certainly gave their name to the Masonic companies, which, I believe, had their origin at this time, although some claim to derive them from Solomon. These were called together in the *Loggie* (hence Lodge) by a Grandmaster to treat of affairs common to the order, to accept novices, and confer superior degrees on others. The chief Lodge had other dependencies, and all members were instructed in their duties to the Society, and taught to direct every action to the glory of the Lord and His worship ; to live faithfully to God and the Government ; and to lend themselves to the public good and fraternal charity. In the dark times, which were slowly becoming enlightened, they communicated to each other ideas of architecture, building, stone-cutting, the choice of materials and good taste in design. Strength, force, and beauty were their symbols. Bishops, princes, men of high rank who studied architecture fraternized with them, but the mixture of so many different classes changed in time the spirit of the Freemasons. The original forms of building were lost when the science fell into the hands and caprice of venal artisans."

The Bishop of Salisbury in the *Diocesan Gazette*, May, 1898, speaks of an inscription of the twelfth century, preserved in the Museum at Jaffa, which is in memory of Magister Filipus, one of the Comacine Masters, who came over with the King of England (Richard) and who had built a portion of the wall " from gate to gate." Evidently Magister Filipus from the English Masonic Lodge, fraternized and worked with the brethren of the Roman and Eastern Lodges.

Hughan in his *Origin of the English Rite*, clearly proves that there is no evidence of the three degrees of E.A., F.C., and M.M. as we now know them being worked before the early part of the eighteenth century, although Gould in his *History of Freemasonry*, from the Ancient Charges establishes the continuity of the Society throughout the long period of at least five hundred years previous.

This, I think, will be sufficient to establish not only the connection, but the continuity of modern speculative Freemasonry, with the operative Lodges of the Comacine Masters.

This paper is the outcome of a series of visits, extending over a number of years, to the Cathedrals and Monastic ruins on the continent and in our own land.

I want more particularly to speak of that magnificent pile of ruins - Fountains Abbey. As I walked through chancel and cloister, nave and transept, chapter house and refectory, I thought This is the outcome of Freemasonry, and if this be true, either directly or indirectly, then the Church owes a great debt to these men, not only for the buildings but for the preservation of spiritual life in what we now term the dark ages.

The fact that Masonry survives after so many centuries of its existence while other associations of men, once powerful by the rank and number of their members, have perished beyond recovery, and mighty empires have passed away so completely that the site of many a once glorious capital is disputed, proves that the Institution is one possessed of a vitality such as could only be derived from its great intrinsic excellence and also its fitness for the accomplishment of great and important objects.

Religion and Freemasonry are more closely allied than is generally admitted. Dean Farrar said, "Religion is not the outcome of the Bible, but the Bible is the outcome of religion which was in the world long ages before the first line of the Bible was written." The connection between Religion and Freemasonry is so close that for the genesis of both we must go back to primal man, and I think we must admit that "Religion is the parent of Architecture, that all styles of architecture are hieroglyphics upon a large scale, exhibiting to the heedful eye forms of worship widely differing from each other, and proving that in almost every religion with which we are acquainted, the form of the Temple was the hierogram of its God, or of the peculiar opinion of its votaries." If this quotation is correct, and I think it is, I maintain that even before the period when Temples were first furnished with roofs, we find displayed in the Altars, Pillars, and Pavements raised from time to time, that these displays of architectural refinement were appendages of religious worship and the expression of its devotion.

You will hardly need to be reminded that our present system of speculative Freemasonry is of comparatively recent date. I have endeavoured to shew there is little doubt but that it is lineally and archaeologically the successor of the Guild fraternities of Operative Masons. Whence then, you may enquire, did the guilds obtain the Masonic legends? It is quite possible that even the Anglo Saxon guilds may be traced back to the Roman guilds to Greece and the East, to Tyre, Jerusalem and Egypt, and I confess I am not inclined to abandon the legend of the Temple, or even a connection with the more ancient mysteries.

After the fall of the Roman Empire came in another practice of the Operative guilds, namely, Christianity, and how that

eventually developed into the cosmopolitan teaching of Freemasonry is the difficulty the Masonic student and historian has to confront. Personally I fully accept the guild theory, going up to the Roman Collegia ; and that the Roman Collegia had both a sympathy and association with Grecian and Syrian and even Hebrew fraternities of Masons. We cannot otherwise account for "Mason's marks " which we find in all ecclesiastical and great national buildings. Bro. E. W. Shaw, who for many years devoted himself to a patient study of these marks, and made a collection of many thousand, held that the marks could, by careful study, be distinguished, and showed that the marks at Fountains Abbey were those of French Masons. Bro. Shaw thought he could trace the marks of the Master Mason, the Fellow, and the Apprentice. He even thought he could see what he termed "blind marks "- that is, the marks of those who were not actually members of the Lodge. It is very remarkable that these marks are to be found in all countries in the passages of the Pyramids; on the underground walls of Jerusalem; in Herculaneum and Pompeii; on Roman walls and Grecian temples ; in India, Mexico, Peru, Asia Minor-as well as on the great ruins of England, Scotland, France, Germany, Spain, Portugal, and Italy. These marks developed as time went on, from the alphabetical and numeralistic to the symbolic. We may accept these marks especially in mediaeval times, if not at all times in the history of building fraternities, as the outer tokens of an inner organization; that taken from geometry, they constituted a sort of universal Masonic alphabet, which with some rational variations, was a language the Craftsmen could understand; that all who worked these stones and raised these wondrous buildings were Freemasons, free of that Craft, Lodge

or Guild, and that there was one common bond of sympathy among good men and craftsmen, and friendly aid wherever the civilizing and religious fraternities set their feet and opened their Lodges, still as dear to the honour of God and the welfare of the Brethren.

How else can we explain many other evidences which attest the existence of these building guilds. The Masonic guild system is one which to a certain extent became independent of all other initiatory or probationary systems, but not altogether; and though it does exist self-made, so to say, by the natural course of things and the needful changes of time, yet it does preserve in it traces of a quondam connection with the ancient mysteries, which for a long time retained many lingering evidences of primeval truth. May we not, then, regard Freemasonry as the product of mediaeval guilds, and those guilds the successors of earlier guilds, thus linking on Freemasonry through many centuries to the building societies of the old world.

In the time of Athelstan, the word guild is used in the sense of a fraternity, and we know that there were guilds of operative masons and also religious guilds, ecclesiastics holding prominent positions in the former as well as in the latter, and that these carried on all the church and much of the secular building in this country. If then we are the descendants of these guilds the Church owes Freemasonry much, not only for the buildings themselves, but for helping to guard during the dark ages those truths which she preaches to-day.

When the Solomonic origin of Freemasonry was first propounded it is difficult to say; but I fancy that, as long as there has been any mystical teaching, the tradition of

Solomon and Hiram have been carefully cherished. I see no reason why the Solomonic tradition should not be retained. At any rate, it is very ancient, and as the tradition preceded the Constitutions we obtain a very venerable antiquity for it. The building of King Solomon's Temple is a mighty landmark in the history of operative art, and may well have been preserved amid the fraternities of operative masons as a striking and cherished legend. And I venture to assert that so long as Freemasonry endures the connection between modern and Solomonic masonry must continue. I do not assume, because I accept the legend in its spirit of the older guilds, that therefore modern Freemasonry is an exact counterpart of the Masonic association of the building of the Temple. That from the nature of things is impossible and absurd. But what I do say is this : as there is no *a priori* reason why an old Masonic tradition should not be true in the main, I see no reason to reject the world-wide story of King Solomon's protection of a Masonic association.

Until the suppression of the monasteries, whose usefulness had in a great measure passed away, these guilds formed a most important element in social life.

The term Free and Accepted belonged to the medieval guilds - persons were admitted, accepted, made free or entered of the guild, and as in Freemasonry there were three degrees, the master, journeyman or fellow craft and apprentice. These operative masons were banded together in a secret and mystic fellowship, and were it not for the fact that the operative masons and the monastic orders, to whom mystery would have a sensible attraction, were so closely allied it would be difficult to credit the fact that they preserved through changing centuries the leading characteristics of

speculative Freemasonry, and the two, operative and speculative Freemasonry, are closely allied, as precursor and result.

The guilds of masons seem to have attached themselves to monasteries especially, and to have sent distinguished masons all over the country from time to time, to consult, work, or direct other bodies at work. Further, I think it is this very close connection with the monasteries which has preserved that peculiar character of legend and tradition which so marks our Masonic Constitution. The inner knowledge of Masonry was probably confined, in those days, to a clever few, the Master Masons, who were all men of education and information.

Perhaps we apply too literal a meaning to the word "Mason." Hutchinson, who published *The Spirit of Masonry* in 1775, suggests that the word implies "a member of a religious sect, and a professed worshipper of the Deity who is seated in the centre of Heaven." We may not be prepared to go quite so far as that, still I think we ought to look beyond the things symbolized to the great Original.

In the so-called Locke or Leyland MS., whose authenticity is, however, called into question, we read "Certain questions with answers to same concerning the Mystery of Masonry, written by the hand of King Henry VI and faithfully copied by John Leyland." This John Leyland was appointed by Henry VIII at the dissolution of monasteries to search for and save such books and records as were valuable. One question on this MS. is "What arts hath the masons taught mankind?" The answer is "Agriculture, architecture, astronomy, geometry, numbers, music, poetry, chemistry, government, and religion." This is a bold assertion and it seems curious to find religion classed as an art. We should have a

difficulty to disprove the claim made, and in a measure it bears out my contention of the close alliance between the guild of operative masons and the religious guild.

In a list of Grand Masters drawn up by Enthick in 1767 we find the names of St. Alban, St. Augustine, St. Swithin, Alfred the Great, St. Dunstan, an Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishops of Exeter, Sarum, and Winchester, Henry I, Henry VII, Charles II, and many other important personages. Although the list is apocryphal, it certainly goes to confirm the fact of close alliance between Freemasonry and the Church, in that so many eminent individuals spiritual and lay were at various times Grand Masters of the Order.

The symbols which surround us, the "all-seeing eye," the pentacle or five-pointed star, the double triangle, the inverted Tau on the apron of the Worshipful Master (which we mistakenly call a level), the apron itself, the seven stars, the point within a circle, and a host of other emblems which I have not time to enumerate much less explain-those old words such as *hele*, *tile*, *cowan*, and many others which have long since ceased to be used in ordinary conversation-these things distinctly point to a close connection with a time long past.

Probably there are some present who are not prepared to accept the idea that the Church owes anything to Freemasonry but that it is rather the reverse. I would ask you to bear in mind the fact that the principles of Freemasonry had their origin at a period when diversities in religious faith did not exist; hence it may be typical of that time when there shall be "one fold and one Shepherd," and may be justly called a universal religion and constitute itself a centre of unity to men of all creeds and all nations.

From the days of the Tabernacle, and the erection of the first Temple of the Living God, the science and zeal of the Craft, have ever been foremost in erecting Temples to His honour and glory.

We can point with just pride to the noble Cathedrals and other grand structures which are the handiwork of our ancient brethren, and as their lineal descendants we may claim some portion of their imperishable fame, being without doubt their legal representatives.

Having said this much as to Freemasonry proper, I must ask your attention to a brief study of the Monastic Order, whose buildings suggested this paper.

I shall not speak of the austere Benedictine Order, although it is much older, because for our purpose the Cistercian will go sufficiently far back, and probably the debt due by the Church of the present day is greater to the Cistercian - an Order founded by Richard Harding, a Dorset man, whose early years were spent at the monastery at Sherborne from thence he made a pilgrimage to Rome, and on his return, after staying for some time with a company of monks in Burgundy, settled at Citeaux, and became the first Abbot of Cistercium. In 1113 thirty men appeared at the gates of Citeaux and asked to be received as novices. Their leader was a man whose character and strength made him the greatest churchman of his time. With the accession of Bernard, the Cistercian Monastery speedily grew into the Cistercian Order.

Thus the little county of Dorset may indirectly claim to have furnished the finest work of the early masons, in conjunction with the brethren of this Order, have left on

record, and which I venture to assert has never been equalled.

In 1132, Archbishop Turstin went to his country seat at Ripon to keep Christmas, taking with him thirteen brethren who had seceded from the Benedictine Abbey of St. Mary at York, and established them on his own land amongst the yew trees of the narrow valley of the Skell, on the site now known as Fountains Abbey, the largest and best preserved monastic edifice in England.

The following spring the brethren sent messengers to St. Bernard, at Clairvaux, asking to be admitted to the Cistercian Order. At this time Bernard was the greatest man in Europe. He had just decided between two rival claimants which was the true Pope. He received the men of Fountains with great kindness and sent them back with a letter, which is still in existence, and with them he sent Geoffrey, a monk of his own monastery, to teach the brethren of Fountains the new ways and instruct them in building and in religion.

The seed sown bore fruit, for within twenty years Fountains sent out architects and monks and founded eight other abbeys.

The whole of these were built in the prescribed plan of St. Bernard's Abbey at Citeaux, and I ask you to remember that monasteries from the seventh until the twelfth centuries were built after the plan of a Roman villa, in which the cloister resembles the peristyle of the Roman mansion. There were also in monasteries, as in Roman villas, an outer courtyard in which were situated the various workshops used by the lay brethren. There was, however, one entirely new element in the monastery - the church, the largest and most important building, and regulated the position of the rest.

The first architect was Geoffrey of Clairvaux, who, as I stated just now, was sent by St. Bernard to instruct the monks at their entrance into the Order. These monks, rich in faith, laid the foundations of their church upon the grand line it stands to-day. They built, not after our manner, to the size of the congregation - they were intent upon the glory of T.G.A.O.T.U. The building was an evidence of their conception of the dignity, strength, and beauty of the Christian religion.

The essential purpose for which Fountains Abbey was founded was the pursuit of religion. The prevailing interpretation which was put upon religion made it consist in great measure, of the saying of services. Out of the confused noises of the common street the monks had retired into the quiet of the monastery in the hope of meeting God. And they sought God in the church.

The builders - with the exception perhaps of the master builder, who was sometimes the Abbot were lay brethren, who, however, were monks, but quite distinct from their brethren of the choir and cloister. At the beginning of monasticism most of the monks were laymen. They had separated themselves not only from the world but from the church. In an institutional time when it was commonly accounted essential to be in the communion of the church, the monks were individualists. The church, however, owed them a debt, and very wisely, quietly and patiently followed them, and by and by most of the monks were priests. But it was a long process, and during a great part of the time the convents of monks were lay fraternities, having only such priests as were needed for the rites of the church. Thus the monastic services were composed and arranged for laymen. Indeed, the monasteries were never thoroughly adjusted to the conventional church system.

They were never under the control of the diocesan Bishop. Sometimes they defied him openly; sometimes they gave him the nominal office of visitor and defied him privately. In general he had little more authority over Benedictine or Cistercian than he has at present over Presbyterian or Methodist.

As an illustration of this we may cite the history of the Dean and Chapter of Wells, a cathedral clergy without a bishop. They were a corporation of secular canons with rules and constitution very like those made at the time of their foundation, and until 1855 were practically independent of the Bishop of Bath and Wells.

Accordingly the lay brethren of Fountains were so named, not to distinguish them from their brethren in priests' orders, but to mark a difference between them and the cloister brothers.

It was characteristic of the Cistercians that they found a place for the piety of these men, and they taught that the brother that could design and erect the house of God, or plough, or bake, or do the humblest service, may be as religious as the one who recited a litany. So these lay brethren, like St. Christopher at the ford, consecrated their talents to the service of God, and thus sanctified their tasks by doing them as the servants of Heaven. All honour then to these lay brethren who in conjunction with their brethren of the cloister have done so much for us, and as these men were the undoubted forerunners of Freemasonry, I maintain that the Church of to-day owes a debt of gratitude to our Order.

There is a certain resemblance between these old monasteries and lodges of Freemasons, inasmuch as in a world hopelessly divided into Classes, the

monastery was, in a sense, the home of democracy. Here the humblest man, if he could but read and write, might rise as he deserved to be the kitchener, the hospitaller, the sacrist, the cellarer ; some day who could tell? - the abbot, wearing a mitre, consorting on terms of equality with the noblest in the realm, ruling his fellow craftsmen.

The great St. Bernard wrote on the walls of his monastery - "What are you here for, Bernard?" and it would be well if we asked ourselves, what are we here for? why are we Freemasons? I count not that Brother as a true Mason at heart who professes to admire our Institution because it is the *peculiar* exponent of morality. If he cannot learn morality out of Freemasonry he will never learn it at all. He is no true Mason who parades it as the special attribute of Freemasonry that it creates a fresh bond of brotherhood between man and man. If he cannot find the principles of "Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth," without the help of Freemasonry I very much fear that he will never find them. Still less do I count him a true Mason who looks upon our Lodge meetings as a mere occasion for amusement and convivial enjoyment; forgetting that our Lodges have been solemnly consecrated to the name and service of God; forgetting that the blessing of God is invoked whenever we meet or part; forgetting too, that God's special assistance was implored at every step that he has ever taken in Freemasonry. Nor even is he a true Mason who is content with the mere parrot-like acquisition of our ritual, however artificially fluent and impressive may be his manner and delivery in the rehearsal and performance of our ceremonies. But he is the true Mason *at heart* who attends his Lodge *as a duty*; who comports himself when in Lodge as one who is discharging a duty and who is assisting in

carrying on a great work; and who, when the matter is brought before him, is ready to believe, and to rejoice in the belief that this Institution is an heirloom of God's handiwork in the hearts of our forefathers, as exemplified in the guilds of masons and religion, that, as they shewed, it embodies a scheme for the moral education of the world, and further, that it has preserved in a peculiar manner the archives of the growth of religious thought in mankind.

Brethren, if as I have endeavoured to show that Freemasonry of to-day is the outcome of these old guilds, more particularly of the two to which I have so frequently referred - the masonic and the religious, which raised those grand old buildings like Fountains Abbey and others, whose majestic ruins we still have, who did their utmost to hand down to posterity the truth in its simplicity, then indeed we must admit that the Church does owe a lasting debt of gratitude to Freemasonry.

Could we but grasp these truths and be determined to act them out, then Freemasonry would lead us to far better, higher, purer, and holier notions of God than can ever be conceived by those who fail to think of Him and of His work from this point of view. For it is the Light of Freemasonry, rightly studied, which brings out into high relief the truth which is contained in His revealed Word (though we often fail to see it there) - the grand truth that He is the Educating Father of all flesh; the One God, eternally the same, whose holy inspiration it was that guided the hearts of His heathen children of old who were feeling after Him, groping after Him in the darkness of those past ages, which, as the Apostle Paul told the Athenians on Mars' Hill, "God winked at "that God and Father " of whom and through whom" have been all things from the beginning of creation, and

"to whom" all true study of His works and of His laws must ultimately tend to conduct us.

Brethren, the Church is indebted to Freemasonry for very much in the past, and whatever may be her future she has to-day the promise and potency of full and vigorous life. They who believe in her commission and know her history are they who have the firmest faith in her future.

I close with the inscription thrice repeated on the tower of Fountains Abbey: "To God alone be honour and glory for ever." - *So mote it be.*

The following is a list of the principal Books and Authorities referred to or quoted:
Fountains Abbey, by Geo. Hodges, Dean of Episcopal Theological College, Cambridge, Massachussets ; Studly Royal and Fountains Abbey, by George Parker; Memorials of Fountains Abbey, published by Surtees Society; Mr. W. H. St. John Hope; Mr. R. Welbran ; Yorkshire Archaeological journal; Life of St. Stephen Harding ; History of the Beginning of the Cistercian Order; English Monastic Life, by Abbot Gasquet ; Cathedral Builders, by Leader Scott; Coming of the Friars, by Rev. A. Jessop ; Eve of the Reformation, by Rev. F. A. Gasquet ; English Black Monks of St. Benedict, by Rev. E. L. Taunton; Henry VIII and the English Monasteries, by Rev. F. A. Gasquet ; Origin of the English Rite, by W. J. Hughan, P.G.D. ; Gould's History of Freemasonry; Spirit of Masonry, by Hutchinson ; Quatuor Coronati, vol. XII, pt. 2, article by G. W. Speth, P.A.G.D.C.