

THE TEMPLAR STREAM ENTERS FREEMASONRY

As the 18th Century opened, Masonry, as it had existed in the past, was changing rapidly. Prior to this, Masonry consisted of one ceremony, hardly of a nature to call a “degree”. A wonderful snapshot of this era in Masonry is afforded by the “Laws and Statutes of the Lodge of Aberdeen” which were written in 1670. The entire text can be found in the second volume of Gould’s classic History. The fifth statute describes the admission of the “Entered Prentese” who would be a mere lad in most cases, perhaps 12 years of age. He (or his family) was required to pay four dollars and to “clothe the lodge”. By this quaint phrase was meant to provide each member a linen apron and a pair of gloves. The ceremony consisted of reading to him the lodge copy of the documents known today as the “Old Constitutions”, many of which have been preserved, and then giving him the “Mason’s Word” which consisted of a certain stance and grip that must always accompany the giving of an oral word. Thus, what was called the Mason Word was a combination of stance, grip and spoken (or whispered) word. This was the entire ceremony.

These statutes make clear that at this time, some of the members were not stonemasons but gentlemen who were what we would call speculative Masons. They were admitted, however, by an identical ceremony. Those who were stonemasons were, upon completion of their (usually) seven year apprenticeship, were released from their Masters by presenting a “masterwork” to the Lodge, proving that they were capable of carrying out the work of the Craft, taking on work themselves, and having their own apprentices. In other words, they had come of age, and could “travel in foreign countries and receive wages as such.” They were then Freemasons.

Notice that there was no further ceremony, nor further secrets bestowed upon them. Obviously their status changed. Yet every man, from his first entrance, knew the Mason’s Word. This new status was shown by being able to place his mark in the lodge’s Book of Marks, and this act signified full membership in the Craft community, a “fellowcraft”.

I have long listened to arguments about the origin of Freemasonry. Each side treats the Craft as if it was one unchanging thing that had a birth in a certain place, and has been passed down almost without change to the present. I think this approach is foolish. Masonry is a growing, ever changing organic thing. Each age, each philosophy, each national culture and every generation has poured its stream into the old river. As the 18th Century dawned, fresh currents were stirring, and the ancient river of Freemasonry felt the influx of new streams that poured into it elements quite different than those familiar forms that had gone before. The origins of these streams and their development in quiet corners of Masonry are beyond the scope of this paper. However I think it is important to note that Masonry came late to England, especially south England, and that other variations of Masonry had long been known in Scotland and in France. This stream had nothing to do with stone building.

Scotland and France have been for long ages united closely together against their enemy, England. France was both the birthplace and the funeral pyre of the Knights Templar, and Scotland was the refuge for many of them after they were disbanded by the Pope. Old Scottish cemeteries are filled with Templar crosses. Based on the fiction of the “first Grand Lodge” the 1717 group wrote their history of Masonry, and many have swallowed it whole. From the first, any ceremony except the ancient “first degree” outlined above was considered non-Masonic. But what they really meant was “non southern English”. The entire history of the English

Grand Lodge is a desperate holding action against any other kind of Masonry than the kind they first knew. To this day we hear constantly trumpeted in our ears that phrase from the Constitution creating the UGLE: "There is no Masonry higher than the Third degree". Yet even this Third degree was accepted only after a long and bitter fight.

Why? Well, the short answer is that Hiram Abiff is the type of De Molay, Grand Master of the Templars, struck down by the three ruffians of the Templar traitor, the king, and the pope. All of you know that when you took the Third degree, you were introduced to something very different than the preceding degrees. It felt completely different. And it was much more exciting. That is why, despite all its efforts, the UGLE failed to stem the tide, and remains bitter about this until today.

In 1737 an oration was written by the Chevalier Ramsay which he delivered in France at the Lodge at Epernay in December of that year. Ramsay was a Scot who earned his living by tutoring the children of noblemen, and was attached at the time to the family of the exiled King of Scotland and England, James. This oration is too long to quote in full here, but this extract will prove interesting:

"The Kings, princes and lords returned from Palestine to their own lands and there established divers lodges. At the time of the last Crusades many lodges were already erected in Germany, Italy, Spain, France and from thence, in Scotland because of the close alliance between the French and the Scots. James, Lord Steward of Scotland, was Grand Master of a Lodge established at Kilwinning in the West of Scotland 1286, shortly after the death of Alexander III, King of Scotland, and one year before John Baliol mounted the throne. This lord received as Freemasons into his Lodge, the Earls of Gloucester and Ulster, the one English; the other Irish.

By degrees, our Lodges and Rites were neglected in most places. This is why, of so many historians, only those of Great Britain speak of our Order. Nevertheless, it preserved its splendour among those Scotsmen to whom the Kings of France confided during many centuries the safeguard of their royal person".

Ramsay here alludes to the famous Scotch Guard of the Kings of France, who by tradition had all to be descendants of Templar Knights. The official Masonic history, written by the British, says Masonry came to France in the 1720's. What they mean is that *British Masonry* was imported into France at that time. There it collided and mixed with another, old, and very different Masonic stream. It is to this other stream that Ramsay alludes.

I don't want to give the impression that I think Masonry came from the Templars, because I do not. I think the Templar tradition was a very important stream that flowed into Masonry and changed it and reshaped it to a great extent into the Masonry we have today. It was not a trivial invention of the French and Scots as the Brits like to characterize it, but an old and important source of much of what we today call Masonic. Nor do I think that the Templar traditions were the only very important stream impacting upon Eighteenth Century Freemasonry. I would certainly point to the Rose Croix excitement as another. That, however, will have to wait for a future research paper.

It seems that the patronage of the Scottish royal house in exile, the Stuarts, and perhaps the influence of the Scot's Guard mentioned above, caused these new Masonic degrees to be called

Ecossais, which means “scottish” in French. And there is certainly no doubt that a veritable explosion of degrees took place at this time not only in France, but in Germany (the Strict Observance) and in the West Indies. Here in Vermont we are accustomed to thinking of the various “high” degrees as belonging to either the Scottish Rite or the York Rite. The word York means “northern England” from the important Masonic city situated there, and which received their traditions from Scotland. In terms of these cultural contents, proximity was more important than national boundary lines. So, therefore, both York and Scottish refer to the same thing, the additional degrees of Masonry beyond the original Craft Lodge degree of Entered Prentice. And in the early days these degrees were all mixed together, with Craft Lodges working these additional degrees without any organizing structure. Thus, an Encampment of Knights Templar in England as late as 1824 would work the Mark degrees, Grand Architect, Knight of Malta, Royal Arch, Knight Templar and conclude with the Ne Plus Ultra, which is the 18th degree of our modern Scottish Rite, Knight of Heredom or Rose Croix degree. This division into two organizations of the Rites is American, although the Scottish Rite is world-wide.

These early degrees followed a certain outline that has not changed in time, even though the degrees themselves have undergone many changes. Following the death of the Master Builder, a series of “Vengeance Degrees” followed, whose theme was the pursuit and destruction of the murderous ruffians. These may have mirrored the actual revenge Templars took on many involved in the plot of their destruction. These were followed by degrees in which the Word, lost at the death of the Master, was recovered. In all the earliest versions, it was inscribed on a triangular plate of Gold which Enoch had deposited in a Ninth Vault deep underground, and which was found by workmen rebuilding the foundations of King Solomon’s Temple. This could well be derived from an actual Templar ritual, and be a more or less factual account of what happened to the first Templars during their occupation of the site of Solomon’s ancient Temple. These degrees often include the word Elect or “Elu” in French, indicating chosen special men. They conferred special privileges upon their members, like the right to wear a hat in lodge, or to be always seated in the East.

Further degrees all conferred Knighthood on the members, and many used the trappings of the Templars, such as the Beuseaut, the black and white battle standard, Templar crosses, swords being worn, etc. And in addition, unlike British Masonry which was firmly Humanitarian in its outlook, the high degrees are all markedly Christian. The 18^o of the Scottish Rite, Knight of Heredom, was for many years the final climax of the degree system, using the name Ne Plus Ultra. Its message is that with the coming of Christ, the old order had been transcended, and a new order begun. These degrees admonish their members to vow death to all Moslems, and to defend the Christian faith by force of arms. Even the names of these early degree systems, such as “Knights of the East and West” plainly state that they considered themselves Templarian.

Again, I am not saying that these degrees descended directly from the degrees of the actual Knights Templar. The point is moot. These men, the founders of modern Freemasonry, considered the Templar legacy of paramount importance, as the very apex of Masonry. Their belief and their work has made it so, for these 300 years.

We are accustomed to think of Masonry as something that came from “over there” and was imported more or less whole into our hemisphere. But this also is not so. One very pivotal man in both the organization of the high degrees and their importation into America is Stephan

Morin. He claimed to have received his degrees from a British Provincial Grand Master of the Canary Islands about 1720. He was Master of the Lodge of Perfection in Bordeaux, France, and received a patent to set up lodges of high Masonry wherever he traveled in 1761. Starting out on this adventure, his ship was immediately captured by the British Navy and he was taken to London in 1762, where he became a famous Masonic visitor. He clearly taught London lodges the embryo system of Knights Kadosh, Princes of the Royal Secret, and was perhaps involved in the Royal Arch lodges which flourished in London at this time, albeit in secret from the ruling Grand Lodge of England. In 1763, he sailed to the West Indies, taking up residence in what is now Haiti near the capitol of Port au Prince. He traveled widely, visiting Jamaica where he appointed Henry Francken a Deputy Inspector General of the 33rd degree. He later moved to Jamaica where he died and was buried at Kingston in 1771.

Many of our present degrees, most notable the 33rd, were apparently either created or organized by Stephan Morin. His deputy, Henry Franken, established a Lodge of Perfection in Albany in 1767 and left us the earliest manuscripts of the high degrees of the Scottish Rite known to exist anywhere. This manuscript now resides in a climate controlled vault in the library of the NMJ AASR in Lexington, MA. This Albany lodge, still in existence today, worked both what we would call York Rite as well as the degrees of the Scottish Rite. Apparently all these degrees were imported by the Dutchman Henry Franken.

Ultimately, the present day Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite was formed in Charleston, South Carolina by Masons fleeing the Negro revolt in Haiti and by veterans of the War of Independence. This was the mother body of all Scottish Rite bodies in the world today. And here in America also was established what is now known as the York Rite of Freemasonry. All of the degrees of both these bodies were organized out of a pool of degrees that had been worked for many years with no governing organization. So you can see that the torch, if you will, of Masonic development was passed very early to America, and it was here that Masonry developed into its modern forms. The guiding light in all this long development was the Templar idea of Christianity, Knighthood, and human Perfection. Nothing here about stones.

I have sketched out here, in a very brief way, how the old river of Stone Masonry was flooded and completely transformed by the great stream of Templar ideas flowing into it at the beginning of the 18th Century. It can be only a point of curious history whether Templars actually joined early stonemason lodges, what degrees the actual Templars used, etc. The point of obvious and overwhelming importance is that early Masonry took up the Templar idea, and used it to create the multitude of Masonic degrees which ultimately formed the great Masonic systems that are used today by millions of Masons around the world. As I said above, this was not the only important stream flowing into the old river of the Craft lodges, but it was one of the great decisive influences that created the great Craft we know and love today.

Thank you & God Bless.

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