

THE EVOLUTION OF SPECULATIVE FREEMASONRY,

[A Paper read at the Installed Masters' Lodge of Wellington, by
M. W. BRO. HERBERT J. WILLIAMS, W.M.]

An opinion has been expressed that a proportion at least of the papers presented to this Lodge should be of such a character as may induce debate, and so maintain an interest in the objects sought to be attained.

Theoretically this may be correct, but there is more difficulty than at first sight appears in reducing the theory to practice, as, judging from the work of other research Lodges, the more abstruse Masonic questions which are generally deemed to be debateable have not evoked that amount of consideration anticipated, while, on the other hand, minor questions of passing moment have elicited more discussion. Hence the difficulty of assuming what is debateable.

The subject I have selected this evening is not of ephemeral character, but is one of prominent Masonic interest to-day, and for years past has been treated by every Masonic writer of note, and from every point of view. Though I do not presume to think that I shall shed much additional light on this all-absorbing topic, yet, as it has not, so far as I am aware, been critically considered in this country, I accept the onus of placing some of the facts before you, with a few comments which you may accept or reject at your pleasure.

From the moment I entered upon my task I recognised the difficulty of trying to condense and place in consecutive form in this short paper some of the opinions of the many eminent writers who have dealt so exhaustively, and treated the subject from every point of view, and in offering comment thereon. In the Masonic world to-day, and especially in England—the parent home of Freemasonry—there are two distinct parties, known as the Speculatives, or "geomatics," and the Operatives, or "domatics," the former contending that Speculative Freemasonry has existed from time immemorial, and the latter firm in the belief that the speculative science has been evolved from the operative or guild Lodges in the year 1717, the date of the foundation of the G.L. of England. There are many theories as to the origin of Freemasonry, Dr. Oliver, the once versatile writer, contending that it was almost coeval with the creation of the world, and he designates some of the patriarchs as holding the offices of W.M. and Wardens. Others, again, are of opinion that Freemasonry is indissolubly associated with the Ancient Mysteries, while a very much smaller section imagine that the Speculative Craft was evolved from the order of Rosicrucians. But this latter contention was disposed of, at any rate to the satisfaction of the members of the Manchester Association for Masonic Research, on 29th January last, when Bro. Geo. Atkinson read a paper entitled "De Quincey's Inquiry into the Origin of the Rosicrucians and Freemasons," and we learn that "the lecture elicited the facts that De Quincey had no connection with either of these societies, but, being possessed of one of the most astute minds of his age, he grasped the trend of public curiosity by turning his pen to profitable account in writing an essay on a subject of general interest for a popular periodical. The opium-eating essayist based his efforts most largely on the publication of Professor J. G. Buhle, of Gottingen, of whom, however, lie seems to have entertained a very poor opinion."

Dr. Oliver, in referring to the fall of Adam, says : "He (Adam) might lose a portion of that knowledge which he enjoyed in the immediate communication with God and angels, . . . but he would certainly retain a recollection of those degrees of knowledge which are within the compass of human capacity. Among the rest . . . lie retained a perfect recollection of that speculative science now termed Freemasonry." Preston, another Masonic writer, out-herods Oliver when he affirms : " From the commencement of the world we may trace the foundation of Masonry. Ever since symmetry began, and harmony displayed her charms, our Order has had a being. But ancient Masonic traditions say—and, I think, justly—that our science existed BEFORE the creation of this globe, and was diffused amidst the numerous systems with which the grand empyreum of universal space is furnished." As a further illustration of the shallow foundation upon which the antiquity of Speculative Freemasonry has been made to rest, I again quote Oliver : " Operative Masonry was cherished by the Egyptians, who received it from their great progenitor Mizraim. . . . We learn also, from hieroglyphical inscriptions which still exist on Egyptian monuments, that Speculative Masonry was originally known amongst that people, though afterwards deteriorated to advance the propagation of idolatry." Oliver then somewhat illogically adds the following footnote : "Of these inscriptions candour

obliges me to remark that, their interpretation being rather equivocal, they are by no means a certain criterion of Masonic truth, particularly as the institution is founded on those *leges non scriptae*, which are unattainable by all mankind, excepting to the initiated." Dr. Oliver then makes the further statement that—"Our claims to antiquity, however, do not rest upon the exclusive authority of those inscriptions, though they are adduced as a corroborative proof of the existence of Masonry in the ages immediately posterior to the Flood, the principal evidences being found amongst that people who preserved the true worship of God." To my mind what the Doctor calls the "principal evidence" is as vague as the hieroglyphics are equivocal. One other quotation is almost amusing in its boldness. It states that, "Antediluvian Masonry depending in a great measure upon oral tradition, from the paucity of records ascending to these ages, some degree of conjecture must necessarily be used; but these conjectures, at all times, however distinguishable from fact, being founded on the strongest and most irrefragible supposition, will amount to nearly the same thing as direct proof." It is scarcely a matter of surprise that belief in the antiquity of Freemasonry is shaken when founded upon such mythical grounds.

A later champion of the antiquity theory (Bro. Chalmers I. Paton), in a pamphlet entitled "The Origin of Freemasonry," waxes wroth at the 1717 proposition, and in his preface says : " To maintain the honour or excellence of Freemasonry, and at the same time to maintain its BASE ORIGIN is ridiculous." He assumes that if the 1717 theory is correct, Speculative Freemasonry was " devised, promulgated, and palmed upon the world by Dr. Desaguliers, Dr. Anderson, and others." He further adds that it is in the highest degree probable that the Craft has existed from very ancient times, distinct from all other crafts, and peculiar in its organisation. In his opinion, the mere builder or hewer of stone might be nothing more than an operative mason, but those who planned a building and superintended its erection must always have been men of highly superior culture and intelligence. He holds that a strong resemblance to the modern system of Freemasonry can be traced in the architectural Collegia of the ancient Romans, and in the STEINMETZEN of Germany in the Middle Ages.

The limits of this short paper will not permit me to refer generally to the many eminent writers on this subject, but it will be interesting to make passing reference to the elaborate theory contained in the writings of a brother whose name has been mentioned in this Lodge on a former occasion. I refer to Bro. Dr. Albert Churchward, who quite recently contributed five articles to the "Freemason," London, his subject being "Ancient Masonic Revelations, Freemasonry the Bridge of History uniting the Past with the Present." He opens his subject by reference to a paper read by a Bro. Houghton at the Manchester Association for Masonic Research and the subsequent remarks of the Sec., Bro. Pollard, who, in the discussion that followed the reading of the paper, said : " The lecturer has been rather too much inclined in his researches to accept every evidence favouring his point of view, and to reject everything on the other side, and that he believed no connecting link had been established, however close the points of resemblance might be." To this Bro. Churchward replies : " As regards Bro. Pollard's remarks, may I ask what evidence there is in existence against the fact that our order originated in Egypt ?" which query would appear to be somewhat ungenerous, as asking the brother to prove a negative. Referring to the writings of Dr. Krause, he says : " If we take the theory propounded by Krause, what do we find ? He has endeavoured to prove that Freemasonry 'originated' in the association of operative Masons who, in the Middle Ages, travelled through Europe, and by whom the cathedrals and monasteries were built. Granting that these associations spring from the building corporations of the Romans, to what does it point ? The initiates of the Architectural Colleges of the Romans did not, however, call themselves Brothers or Companions ; they were styled Collega or Incorporatus. These Colleges held Lodges wherever they established themselves, had signs, symbols, tokens, and passwords, which they had learnt and received from the Chaldean Magicians. These Chaldean or Turanian Priests, nevertheless, were of inferior order, and had been initiated into part of the lesser mysteries of the Egyptians only. In fact, they were the working or operative Masons of the old Egyptian Stella Mythos Cult, from the seventeenth Nome of Upper Egypt, and were styled Companions. Many of these working or operative Masons still exist here in this country ; they were initiated in the first and second degrees only of the old Egyptian cult, because they, and they alone, were employed to look after the building of the temples and keep the secrets of the same." Dr. Churchward then propounds the following theory :—" The Stella Cult existed for at least 300,000 years, as witnessed by records found and still extant; they travelled out and went, out over Europe, Asia, part of North and South America, Central America, and the islands of the Pacific. as

well as Africa. The remains and ruins of the large cities and temples found throughout the world were mostly built by these people. The Solar, who came after, built some, but the buildings of each are easily distinguished one from the other. The former were iconographic, the latter were not. They worked out all the revolutions of the sun, moon, and stars, and the ritual of ancient Egypt, upon which all doctrines throughout the world have been founded ; so that for the oldest records of our Brotherhood we have to go back as far as Totemic Sociology over 800,000 years. This is proved by the fact that six skeletons of Stella Mythos people were found in Lombardy in the Pliocene strata.; and the above is a low estimate for that. Now, we find from these old temples that all our signs and symbols were in use then just as we use them now ; there is no difference, except that in some cases we have slightly modernised them. Their rituals, with slight modifications, were the same as ours."

He also gives a somewhat graphic description of an Egyptian initiatory ceremony, which, according to him, is closely approximated to our own. He says : " Their W.M. or High Priest was placed in his chair with the same grip and token as we use at the present day, as may be seen on one of the bas-reliefs of the Temple of Khumutu, at Elephantine. Here the W.M.E. is presented to the Master in the Chair, who then places him in his chair with the grip and token, and gives him the word of the Chair, which in Egyptian is Meat-Heru,' meaning one whose word must be obeyed.' " Notwithstanding our brother claims to have an Egyptian ritual, the extraordinary nature of the foregoing coincidence must be my excuse for still having a doubting mind. Dr. Churchward gives the Operative Masons an origin dating back at least 300,000 years, and naively remarks that doubtless they will be satisfied with their antiquity. But how elated must the Speculatives be to contemplate a recorded history of 800,000 years.

Time will not permit me to make further reference to other eminent, writers who are advocates of what is known as the Mystical theory; but I must pass on to the claims of the Moderns, whose contention is that until the evolution of 1717 the known Freemasonry was entirely confined to the operative or "domatic" class. Many eminent Masonic. writers have supported this claim, amongst the number being Hughan, Woodford, Lyon, Dr. Mackey, and Findel. But the most energetic supporters are Bros. Clement E. Stratton, and Dr. Thomas Carr, both active members of operative as well as speculative Lodges. Bro. Stretton claims that—"in the time of Solomon, and in our own time, the Operative Freemasons were divided into two grades, Square and Arch, and each grade is divided into seven degrees. The Apprentices, the Fellows of the Craft of Free Mason, the Super Fellows, and the Erectors are Operative Masons who work with their hands in stone-work ; but the fifth degree (Menatychim), sixth degree (Harodim), and seventh degree (Enthroned Master Mason) certainly are not common workmen. In ancient times bishops, priests, monks, architects, and civil engineers were members of the fifth, sixth, and seventh degrees. Before an Operative Freemason could then, or can now, be enthroned in the seventh degree, he must pass an examination in the following subjects : Grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy ; also in the five orders—Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, and Composite. At Freemasons' Hall, Leicester, on Monday, 25th September, a paper by the writer was read before the Lodge of Research, No. 2429, when the differences between the two systems were made quite clear. With reference to the position of the throne of Solomon, it was customary to say it was in the East. However, the Operative Freemasons know that King Solomon had his throne in the West, so that he could see the rising sun. The change of the Throne from the West to East was only made by Anderson in the 1717 period."

Bro. Dr. Carr wrote a paper on the Ritual of the Operative Freemasons, firstly, to prove that Speculative Freemasonry is derived from an Operative source, and secondly, to give some account of the Operative Freemasons, of their ritual, and of their customs. This paper was certified to in May, 1911, by the Lodge Mount Bordon, No. 110, Leicestershire, of Operative Masons, as " a true and accurate account of the ceremonies practised by their Lodge, and that the tradition which has been handed down to us is that these ceremonies have been practised from time immemorial." In the introduction to his paper Bro. Carr states that most Speculative Freemasons are aware that a Guild of Operative Freemasons still exists, and that the Masons' Company of London is still extant.; that it is well established that societies of Operative Masons existed in England, France, and Italy during the Middle Ages, and built the churches, cathedrals, and bridges which still adorn those countries; also that in Germany there flourished a well organised body of Masons known as Steiumetzen."

In fixing the date of the establishment of Operative Guilds in the Middle Ages Dr. Carr must have been afflicted with an attack of extreme modesty, seeing that it is not disputed that the Roman Collegia, or Colleges of Artificers, were instituted in Rome under Numa in 714 B.C. Dr. Mackey says : " The Colleges of Artificers, and especially those which professed architecture, spread from Rome throughout the provinces and principal cities of the empire. They existed in vigorous activity until the fall of the Roman Empire, and continued to decline during the ages which succeeded the invasions of the barbarians, until they are supposed to have revived in the architectural associations known as the "Travelling Freemasons of the Middle Ages." This statement is sufficient to bridge the gap 'from the year 714 B.C. to the Middle Ages Guilds referred to by Dr. Carr. And it is not difficult to find historical record of organised guilds of the Operative Craft anterior to the celebrated Temple of King Solomon. (To be continued.)

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Continued.**

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Sickles, an American writer, is responsible for the following, which does not lack corroboration :—" For a considerable time previous to the building of Solomon's Temple the Society of Sidonian Architects and Builders had become celebrated throughout the ancient world. A company of these masons and architects, under the superintendence of Hiram the Widow's Son, was sent by the King of Tyre to Solomon to assist in the erection of that stately edifice."

To return to the paper of Dr. Carr, he gives the following explanation of the origin and reason for the password, etc., in Operative Masonry :—" In days when writing was confined to the clerics and diplomas were unknown, it was the readiest solution of the difficulty of an unknown man testifying he was a skilled and accredited craftsman to have a system of passwords and signs which enabled him to prove he had been regularly taught his trade and was no cowan or pretender." It is somewhat singular that both the operative or "domatic" and the speculative or "geomatic" advocates rely on the long list of ancient charges in support of their contentions. Dr. Carr refers to the old regulations and charges of those early days " which have come down to us," and states that eighty examples are known and recognised. Referring to the derivation of Speculative from Operative Freemasons, the doctor says all doubts may be resolved by a study of the first book of constitution originally prepared by Anderson, which, in spite of the many alterations and complete revisal in 1813, still gives unmistakable proof of its operative origin. Bro. Carr says that the Ancient Charges in the Book of Constitution, 1909 (English), are almost identical with those published in the first book in 1723, and especially section 5, under the title—" Of the Management of the Craft in Working," and in which the terms used are obviously and solely operative. Again, the speculative ritual gives proof of its operative origin : (1) In the presentation of the W.Ts.—"As we are not all Operative," etc. (2) Operative Masons are referred to in the Lecture on the 1st T.B. (3) Operative Masons are described in the official lectures : Lecture 1, section 7—Query : How many sorts of Masons are there ? Ans.—Two : Free and Accepted, and Operative. . . . Query—What do Operative Masons learn ? Ans.—The useful rules of architecture—to hew, square, and mould stones, etc.

I regret that time limitation will not permit me to use more of Bro. Carr's paper, but enough has been said on this point, and few even of the champions of the mystical school will have the temerity to declare against the existence of the guilds or associations of operative Masons from very early ages. The questions I wish to consider are :—What grounds the speculative or "geomatic" Mason has to his claim of antiquity; and, if the said claim is not proved, has a speculative element been admitted into the operative guilds, to what extent, and for what purpose? The value of antiquity is very aptly expressed in a - prefatory note to the editor of the Albury M.S. :—"A respect for antiquity, whether applied to institutions or families, has ever had attractions for the human mind, so much so that it has been tacitly agreed the uninterrupted usage of ages should constitute a valid legal custom having the force of law, since otherwise it would never have become a custom. The remote antiquity of a family is a matter of pride to the descendants of an ancient stock; so to belong to

an ancient corporation confers a respectability on its members. A law may be passed and must be obeyed, but unless that law has its foundation on ancient usage, it will never command the respect that its merit deserves ; it must be a custom embodied in law. A custom may receive modifications varying with the changing state of society ; still in the main the old custom remains the basis, and a statute not so based never obtains the reverence due to common law. The origin of the English Constitution can no more be traced to a distinct period than the separation of the Eastern and Western Churches. Its origin is lost in antiquity and the shadow which hangs over a prehistoric period, till at last research reaches an epoch which defies the historian, who, in default of positive data, can only at best deduce from that which is known the state of things which might have existed previously.; and this is as true with respect to Freemasonry as to any other institution. The great mistake into which writers on this subject have fallen lies principally in their ignorance of history, but still more in taking vulgar error for fact, and worse still in pandering to that which they know their readers wish to believe. They allege that symbolical Masonry, as we now have it, existed before the historic period, whereas the question really is at what period Freemasonry ceased to be operative and became purely symbolical or speculative."

It is not hard to understand that since the world's architecture first began the many builders employed have at various times formed themselves into some kind of association in connection with their handicrafts, but it requires some effort of imagination to believe that the speculative Freemasonry of to-day existed in the mists of antiquity. Associating modern Freemasonry with the Ancient Mysteries, in any form, would be to convey the assumption that the aim, work, and end of Freemasonry lies in the performance of mystic ceremonies, and that such ceremonies constitute the only object of the institution, whereas they are only the means to an end—and a small means to a great end—in the present age. It may be assumed, speaking generally, that the advocates of the two sides of this question of evolution are extremists, and neither is disposed to yield one jot to the other. I am not including Dr. Churchward in this category, who holds an unique position which few will care to dispute. As it is morally certain that modern Freemasonry owes much of its position and almost all of its existence to Operative Masonry, so I think that there has been a leaven of the speculative element continually permeating the operative ranks, which has doubtless exercised incalculable influence in the formulation of the laws, ritual, and the ancient charges, which the said Operatives proudly, and with some justice, desire to monopolise.

If we go back to the Roman Collegia we find that the several arts and trades had their respective camps, halls, and religious exercises, and it may be taken for granted that in the year 714 B.C., while the collegia artificum was controlled by its members, a more learned power dominated the religious exercises. Here was an influence—apparently for good—apart from the architects and artificers who constituted the operative element of the guild. Again, the oldest general regulations and fundamental constitutions of Masonry in existence are the " Old York Constitutions of A.D. 926," discovered by Mr. Halliwell in an ancient parchment in the British Museum. Although this document is claimed by both sides as evidence of ancestry, it is clear, as one writer puts it, "that in fifteen articles and fifteen points therein contained there is nothing of a speculative or mystic element, but they were of an entirely practical and operative character." A perusal of these articles and points amply sustains the contention of the Operatives ; but they also go a little further, and prove the presence of a religious element in the drafting of the articles, exercising an influence entirely outside the ordinary trade guild rules. The first of the fifteen points reads : " Every Mason shall cultivate brotherly love and the love of God, AND FREQUENT HOLY CHURCH" (the capitals are mine). The fourteenth article says : " He shall make oath to keep secrets, to be steadfast and true . . . to the King AND HOLY CHURCH." Further charges were added in 1686, and were , contained in a MS. (in the possession of the Lodge of Antiquity, London). The first one enacts : " That ye shall be true men to God and the HOLY CHURCH, and use no error or heresy by your understanding and by wise men's teaching." In each of the foregoing articles the guiding hand of the ecclesiastic can easily be detected. And is it a matter of surprise to find a body of workmen, engaged in the construction of sacred edifices, admitting church dignitaries to their assemblies either as patrons or honorary members, and incorporating the precepts of the church with the practices of their craft? Without doubt, this has constituted a continuous admission of speculative element into the operative, which, while it evidently exercised an influence for good in wisely directing the councils, and by its religious teaching uplifted its members, yet to its credit be it said, there is not the slightest evidence that any attempt was made to dominate the trade control of the guilds.

In latter days the practice was not only continued, but was extended to gentlemen outside the influence and having nothing directly in common with Operatives' Associations. And it is here that a difficulty arises with the Mystical School, and Paton, referring to the admission of Elias Ashmole in 1641, says : "It is of far more importance to enquire how such a man as Ashmole an eminent natural philosopher, chemist, and antiquary—ever thought of BEING MADE A MASON. With operative Masonry he had nothing to do, and there must have been something in the Masonry of his time to induce him to take a part in it." Without attempting to fathom Ashmole's motives, it has been made abundantly clear that other eminent men had joined the operative guilds long prior to Ashmole's admission. The list of Dr. Oliver includes ten kings, sixteen high church dignitaries, and a number of nobles prior to 1641, yet strangely enough omits Vaughan, Ashmole and Sir Robert Moray.

Further, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the guilds had a settled and wise form of government, as amply proved from the copies of the ancient changes extant. They had a ritual which, if their own evidence is to be accepted, embraces most that Speculative Freemasonry has to-day ; hence, if the mysticism which environs Freemasonry at this time is in itself sufficient to attract all classes of the community, then the motives of Ashmole, himself a mystic, may not be difficult to understand.

But a further explanation is furnished by Dr. Wynn Westcott in a recent address delivered before the Rosicrucian College at Sheffield. His subject was "The Connection between Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry," when he is reported by the "American Freemason " to have said : " We had, at the period when Masonry ceased to be a trade guild and became a society for the admission of the gentry and learned, present in London certain men who were members of this curious literary German society of Mystics and Hermetists. We find, also, that these eminent English Rosicrucians were exactly the men whose initiation into the Masonic guild before it became literary or speculative is well proven ; for Vaughan was probably initiated about 1641. Elias Ashmole in 1646, and Sir Robert Moray in 1641."

Gould says : " Christopher Fredrick Nicolai, a learned book, seller of Berlin, advanced a singular hypothesis—viz., that English Freemasonry has its origin in the NEW ATLANTIS of Lord Bacon-' who himself was much influenced by the 'Writings of Andrea, the founder of the Rosicrucian sect, and of Fludd, his English disciple. The "Baconian" apologise bore fruit in the shape of the Royal Society and of an Hermetical and Rosicrucian fraternity, consisting of Ashmole and others, who sought to arrive at truth by the study of alchemy and astrology. The latter was established at Warrington in 1646, and afterwards, in order to conceal their mysterious designs, the members were admitted into the Masons' Company, with the result, as freemen of London, they took the name of Freemasons and adopted the symbols and implements of the Masons' Craft." This latter statement serves two important purposes : Firstly, it supplies a motive for the entry of Ashmole and others into Freemasonry ; secondly, that Freemasonry is not indebted to the Rosicrucians for its origin, but rather that the Rosicrucians were admitted into Freemasonry.

To again quote Gould : "It is therefore very far from being an arbitrary hypothesis that the symbolism we possess has come down to us in all its main features from very early times, and that it originated during the splendour of the mediaeval Operative Masonry, and not in its decline. I am therefore of opinion that if Freemasonry is in any way indebted to hermeticism for its symbolism, the period in which the Saracenic learning found its way into England is the epoch we must look to for its occurrence."

To sum up, in my opinion the claims of speculative Masonry to great antiquity are not proven. The old guilds were of necessity operative associations, some of whose members were engaged in the manual labour of building, while others were employed in what one writer calls the more intellectual occupation of architectural designing. The association, inseparable from the construction of ecclesiastical buildings, induced the admission of certain clerics, which at once provided a speculative element. The same influence may have led to the entrance of royalty and nobles, until the doors were widened to "other gentlemen." The cessation of ecclesiastical building and the increase of the "Speculatives" opened a natural way for the evolution of Speculative Freemasonry. Hence, when the meeting of the four Lodges was convened in 1717, there was a receptive mind fully prepared for the transition stage, and ready to accept the genius of Anderson and his coadjutors. Paton, in his diatribe against what lie terms the 1717 theory, states that such theory would mean that a "new system had been DEvised, PROMULGATED, and 'PALMED' upon the world by Anderson and others," entirely ignoring the fact that it was no new system, but simply the transformation of the old by the

process of that evolution which is constantly in motion. As one writer puts it : "Modern Freemasonry insensibly grew out of the Operative."

Now that Speculative Freemasonry has an admitted second of 200 years of honourable ancestry, the wisdom may be doubted of attempting to add a few hundred more years at the expense of the operative craft. Let it suffice that the Freemasonry of to-day is a philosophic or speculative science, derived from and issuing out of an operative art, to which may be added that it is also engaged in the highest phase of humanitarian work. And it should be the care of every member to-day to use his best efforts to preserve the lustre of the institution, by which means alone it may be calculated to endure throughout all generations.