

MASONIC ANCESTRY

The Art of Building, viz., the formation of an effectual protection against weather and enemies, is likely to have been the one line of skill first worked out by any aboriginal people and considered by them as most important. As knowledge increased and early civilization and culture grew up, beauty and skilled work held this art in a foremost place, and the chief men banded themselves together and kept out unauthorized persons by enforcing strict rules, thus really forming an early guild. The old historians, in occasional passages, have handed down to us details of this sort of development, and have given us very early instances of former civilization in lands whose very history has been lost. Plato, who lived about B.C. 400, relates to us in a book, "Critias", of his own composition that his ancestor, Solon, who lived about B.C. 600, visited Egypt, and lived there for some years. He was there very intimate with the Priests, who told him of a land of former great civilization which had not long before been overwhelmed and lost; a land where learning and science exceeded all that had been handed down and from which the whole known knowledge of the world had come. Solon's visit to Egypt is noted and vouched for by the old writer and philosopher, Plutarch, who, as well as Plato, says that Solon attempted in verse an account of Atlantis which he learned from the wise men of Egypt, but that he left it unfinished. Plato describes this in "Critias" in these words: "The sea of Atlantis was navigable and there was a large island in front of the columns of Heracles, larger than Asia, with other islands from which you might pass through the whole of the opposite continent, which surrounded the true ocean Now in the island of Atlantis was a great and wonderful empire After violent earthquakes and flood in a single day and night the island sank beneath the sea."

This history goes on with a description of their wisdom, etc., and then stops abruptly, as Plato, died before finishing these later designed volumes of his history.

In this account, as far as it goes, the historian only gives a plain and reasonable tale of a very enlightened people, and this is quite borne out by a few other extracts from ancient records, and by some internal evidence. He says, for example, that they built with stone, of which one kind was black, another white, and a third red (such rocks are still used in the Azores). He talks of Atlantis having hot springs (also found in the Azores), and his story is in some ways corroborated by the soundings registered by the 'Challenger,' showing an almost level sea bottom from North Africa and South Europe to the Continent of America, except for one very deep valley and stream course towards the shores of America. Conjoined with these statements there is also evidence of the great similarity of the Egyptians and Mid-American (Mexican, etc.) temples, in shape, angle, and ornamentation. We can also make deductions from the known spread of species, that the animals and plants of America must, in many cases, have been imported from the East. Nothing which is here in evidence contradicts the theory that remnants of the people of Atlantis survived and, carrying with them much of the knowledge of the lost kingdom fled, some to Central America, where wonderful remains of vast cities and advanced civilization still exist in the ruins and deserted architecture of long by-gone days. Another colony may have reached the northwest shore of Africa and, traveling the north coast, found a suitable home in Egypt, whence much knowledge has recently come, through only a tiny portion of what may, in time, furnish us with the records of the Ancient World.

In historical times Egyptian knowledge was always held in the highest reverence and spread to far distant countries. There is much fascination in the huge buildings of that country; of the most solid grandeur; carrying in sculpture and painting on themselves the lasting history of a nation whose skill in mechanics as well as in the art of building is, even in the present century, the wonder of the world. We must not forget that it was these same Egyptian priests who carried the tale of Solon, and that, from them, by him it came to Plutarch and Plato. From Egypt the Science of Building, Architecture, Masonry (all synonymous terms) was

carried to and became especially developed in Greece and Rome. In these countries colleges of architects sprang up, which spread learning to much of the then known world, as we are told by the old writers, and it is to them we specially owe the priceless and beautiful buildings which, under their plans, began to arise. Decorative work became more elaborate and all structures more ornate.

We here should recognize master minds and Master Masons in that little known group of Italian architects, the Comazine masters, who seem to have held tight to old rules and science when they seemed likely to fail elsewhere. Afterwards came the glorious time for Architects and Stone Workers, when civilization spread towards the west, when cathedrals and castles were demanded, and all religious bodies desired the most skilled work, while the monasteries especially upheld the Craft.

This helped further to develop rules and skills, and made necessary the strict regulations of a guild or society which might have power to order the workmen and regulate the admission of younger men where needed.

In this way the Operative Masons arose with trade secrets and free of the Craft, not mere workmen, but working architects, competent to undertake the planning of a building and able themselves to execute the most ornate and difficult portions of the work.

The Lodge, however, was not then probably a permanent body of men but was formed where there was building. There the requisite number assembled as long as the work continued, and when one task was completed the members scattered in different directions to obtain other employment.

Finally, alas! the old guild lost its status and almost died.

Of the gentlemen, or speculatives, who joined the Free Masons, the first we hear of was Ashmole of Lichfield, who tells us in his diary under, date of October 16, 1646, that he was made a Free Mason at Warrington and that once again on March 11, 1682, he attended a meeting of Free Masons in London. Dr. Robert Plot, in his "History of Staffordshire," 1686, gives an account of Free Masonry as carried on in his time, and especially mentions an old volume of parchment with its history and rules.

It appears from Conder's History of the Guild of Masons in London that there were two classes of members in the guild, those who belonged to the Acception, which was a Free Mason Lodge within the Guild, and those who were not members of the Lodge. The members of the Acception, or Lodge, paid extra fees and enjoyed extra privileges. - William Hammond, Grand Librarian, the Grand Lodge of England.

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