

FREE MASONRY 5

ANCIENT FREE MASONRY

What ever the historical value of these old rolls, before referred to, it appears they are copies of original documents arranged by the Ecclesiastics in England previous to the 14th century, and that they constituted the whole ceremony of initiation into the Fraternity of the Builders; that they are markedly Christian; that their secrets were the way to build; that the members were bound by an oath or obligation to keep their secrets confined to the fraternity; that they employed the Square, Level, Compass and Plumb Rule; that there were three classes of workmen, just as in other trades - Apprentices, Journeymen and Master Workmen. These were operative workmen. Just when the speculative moral teaching in these fraternities began is rather difficult to discover. Hughan says: "That speculative Free Masonry existed as far back as the oldest "Charges" preserved is abundantly confirmed by reference to their text." He also says: "That as time went on the legendary portion was virtually fossilized, the part which recited the rules for the government of the fraternity was gradually added to until, in like manner, the regulations became fixed and practically traditional also." He was of the opinion that the oldest manuscripts do not show evidence of signs, tokens and words; that only as we come down to more modern times can we positively affirm that esoteric privileges and customs were connected with Masonic initiations.

Col. Moore, one of the leading Masonic historians of the past century, said: "Passing over the traditions and legends of a Masonry existing previously to the Christian Era, the oldest documents take us no farther back than Ancient Christian Free Masonry or Ancient Symbolic Speculative Masonry, which was the outcome of the teachings of the Christian mysteries ritualistically practised in the British Isles in the 7th and 8th centuries and, later, on the continent of Europe. These were introduced by the Benedictine monks, who, in the early days of Christianity, were the repository of every branch of education and science, under whose instruction and supervision the Masonic Builders operated." In the 10th century a peculiar fraternity of Operative Stone Builders, well known over Europe, claimed the right, under papal privileges, of exercising the building craft throughout all Christendom, and to be exclusive employed on all sacred edifices."

There appears to have been an application of moral principles to the implements and tools of the operative art, a philosophy or speculative theory of moral teaching in these builders corporations. "It is well authenticated that Lodges of Speculative Masonry for instruction were anciently held, presided over by Master Builders. Many of these builders were of high ecclesiastical rank, great learning and renown, who taught the crude workmen the religious and moral principles for which the fraternity was noted, as well as the laws of the Craft. They also instructed them in the then mystery of architecture, which was carefully concealed from those who were not initiated into the brotherhood."

This is in accord with Gould and Pike. Hughan says: "That Speculative Masonry existed as far back as the oldest Charges in abundantly confirmed by reference to their text." That is the text of the old manuscripts before referred to. He also says: "Unfortunately, there is no record of actual Lodge meetings prior to the year 1599, so that the exact proportion that the Speculative bore to the Operative element in such assemblies before that period is more or less a matter of conjecture, though of its Speculative character, in part, there is no doubt."

It is a matter of record that persons who were not Operative Masons were initiated into the Lodges in the 17th century, and elected Masters of Lodges, and that Entered Apprentices were present taking part in the Crafting and election of Masters; also that Entered Apprentices were Masters of the Craft and elected to the Chair. The Earl of Cassilis was Master of Kilwinning in 1670, though they were only Entered Apprentices. In some Lodges the Speculatives exceeded the Operatives, as Aberdeen, in 1670, had 49 members and only eight of them Operative Masons. This is confirmatory of the opinion that there was only one degree or ceremony in the Lodges, that of initiation. Obligations were taken upon the book. A word, token and signs were used in the 17th century, but there is no evidence of more than one ceremony previous to the first part of the 18th century, and after the formation of the first Grand Lodge in England. Previous to the formation of the Grand Lodge of England, 1717-1723, there was no constituent Grand Body of Free Masons. Lodges were independent of each other, though they sometimes met voluntarily in a General Assembly.

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Published in Vancouver, B.C.; 1934

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