

The Origin of Freemasonry

A LECTURE

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by
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To The
Master, Wardens and Brethren
of
The Victoria Lodge, No. IV., Dublin

This Lecture
on the Origin of Freemasonry

delivered
in their Lodge of Instruction
and by them deemed worthy of publication

is respectfully dedicated

by their faithful brother
Robert Longfield

February 14, 1857

The ORIGIN OF FREEMASONRY

The subject which I have selected for this evening's lecture is the "Origin of Freemasonry", a theme which will at once, I should hope, invite the attention of each of my hearers — members themselves of that mysterious and widely-spread body. Every brother has indeed, on his initiation into the Craft, gained some little insight into that which, traditionally at least, has, for many ages, been handed down to us as the origin of that fraternity, of which, we must confess, we are now the scarcely recognised representatives; but few, perhaps, have considered how much truth is hid in our legends, and how realities have been converted into symbols. Few have reflected whether our pretended ancient descent is not a mere modern invention, or whether the present appearance of the Order is the transition state of a mystery corrupted from its purer source in its descent through ages. But your presence here, in this "Lodge of Instruction," convinces me that all apathy on the subject of our organization is past, and that you are anxious to increase the knowledge, the respectability, the zeal, and utility of the fraternity of Freemasons.

The subject I have chosen has been discussed by many learned and acute writers. They have endeavoured to pierce the dark gloom under which, at one time, was hid, almost impenetrably, the origin of Freemasonry, and the probably era of its commencement. Of the labours of those learned and sagacious writers I shall largely avail myself, claiming no credit for any singularity or profundity of my views, but only for the diligence with which I have gleaned from others, and sought to extract, from their speculations, suggestive food for your reflection on this interesting topic, which might also excite the desire in your minds for deeper and more extended research. I have, in truth, but endeavoured to compress into the space of an evening's sitting, the results derived from larger and more accurate works connected with the long-debated question, the "Origin of the Order".

One of the chief objects in such an inquiry as the present is to ascertain if there exists in the secrets and ceremonies, or tenets of the Craft, any evidence of the antiquity, the wisdom, or grandeur of the founders? Are Freemasons a collection of mere convivial individuals — a club, in short, united by some secret signs, but for useless objects, and who would, therefore, in vain seek to graft some appearance of excellence on intrinsic worthlessness? Are they indeed men, but condescending to be amused with trifles fit only for children? Or are their traditions probably linked with

"The wondrous fame
of the past world, the vital words and deeds
Of minds whom neither time nor change can tame,
Traditions old and dark?"

And have they preserved, amidst much that is new, idle, and mere modern adaption, some traits of the almost superhuman wisdom and excellence of their foundation? Each true Mason who hears me will, I am sure, hope that the latter may prove to be the case, and will himself aid in the effort, by united energy, zeal, and honesty of purpose and action, to elevate the body into that place in the social scale which his belief, if not his rational conviction, tells him it once enjoyed. Degenerate worth may be restored; nothing can change folly to wisdom. Symptoms of that probable restoration to ancient glory I already perceive in the earnest desire for improvement and mental culture manifested by the brethren generally.

With those few preliminary observations, designed to awaken your attention, and not to advance any peculiar theory, I shall now attempt to throw some light upon the origin of Freemasonry. But let me first ask your indulgence if, in any remarks which I shall make, it may seem as if I spoke in depreciatory terms of our Order. Such is not my intention; and you will, I hope, kindly attribute to some other motive whatever may not appear laudatory. Even censure, however sparingly applied, may often prove as effectual an instrument of regeneration as unmerited praise. I would also ask your brotherly forbearance if I might appear too openly to touch on the secrets of the Craft. I have, indeed, diligently endeavoured to avoid this error, but if I should, notwithstanding, have fallen into it, I shall gladly receive the fraternal correction. "Sit mihi fas audita loqui" is my guiding wish.

Let each brother now, for a moment, recall to his mind the ceremony of his initiation, and reflect on his newly adopted name, and his objects. How wide the difference — nay, how wholly inconsistent with the objects in this name? There are lawyers who know little of law, and we are assured that there are "physicians of no value;" but both those classes at least PROFESS some acquaintance with the science whence their name is derived. With modern Freemasons this is not the case. The science of Masonry, if they know anything of it, has been learned, not from the traditional lore retained by the elder brethren, and thence not communicated to the ignorant and blinded candidates for admission, but altogether independently of this, and rather in despite of it. Think also on the moral and religious instruction afforded after your initiation, by reference to the symbols — the object lessons, as I

may term them, on the level, square and compass. Those two points dwelt on, even cursorily, will prepare the mind to believe that the name at one time really indicated the nature and objects of the Society, and that the symbolical use of the implements of the Craft was many ages posterior in date to the actual. Any other view would appear to me rather like the tale of St. Patrick teaching the mystery of the "Trinity" by reference to the three-leaved shamrock, or the illustration of the immortality of the soul from the different stages of insect existence, as grub, chrysalis, and butterfly — admirable incidentally as arguments, but which no sane men would ever think of perpetuating by mysteries and brotherhoods. The square, level, &c., were implements in actual use, and of vast importance in the science of masonry practised in the earlier ages of the Craft. The science was lost, and they retained their importance only as symbols and emblems — just as formerly the title duke, marquis, designated an officer of trust, but are now empty titles of heraldry. This consideration has always satisfied me of the vast and undoubted antiquity of Freemasonry in SOME FORM. It was to me incredible that grave men, possessed of such religious culture and habit of thought, as the very initiation into our body supposes, could have been capable of organizing a fraternity of true believers, whose only distinction was, the illustration by visible, external symbols, of those eternal truths which affect us as moral beings. This is not indeed one of those proofs, which would alone be deemed sufficient, of the indisputable antiquity and more recent modification of the mysteries of our Order. It is, however, the best preparation for a calm investigation, by those gleams of light shed by the earlier histories of the world, of the probable origin of a society, once, perhaps, as the name would import, the secret and mysterious repositories of all the valuable knowledge connected with architecture, now actually retaining nothing connected therewith same THE NAME. Now, it is not a little singular that the earliest association of mankind of which we read, is one for the purpose of architecture on a gigantic and immoderately-audacious scale, which resulted indeed in confusion, but which even still, according to the opinion of enlightened travellers, has left traces of its stupendous labours in the mound called the Birs-Nimroud on the plain of Babylon. We read in Genesis, chapter xi., that "the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there. And they said, go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top MAY REACH TO HEAVEN. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar." I need not minutely dwell on the subsequent fate of this tower, the confusion of tongues, and consequent dispersion of mankind. It is only necessary to remark, that you have here a memorable instance of the early

association of masons, for building a city and tower of vast dimensions. This plainly supposes community of idea, thought, and action; arrangements made that some gangs should prepare bricks, others lay them, some skilled labourers, attendants unskilled, definite plans, precise instructions and orders, master minds to direct, and subordinates to execute the growing works, and all so united and linked, and probably marked by such distinctions of dress and emblems as were readily recognisable, that the ruling impulse, "Let us build a city," could be acted on harmoniously by all. This boastful and profane attempt to ascend to heaven provoked the direct intervention of the Lord, which caused the general dispersion of the human race. Thus, long before the time of Abraham, and one thousand years before the building of Solomon's Temple, the oldest and most authentic record of the creation notices the confederacy of masons.

The dispersion of mankind, which was probably by families or tribes, or those identical in one language, radiated from Babel as a centre, east and west — on the east to India, on the west to Syria, Greece, Egypt, and Italy. It would be only natural to expect that the myriads dispersed by this building-foolly or wickedness, would exhibit, in the countries whither they migrated, some traces of their early masonic predilections and skill. And it is, indeed, remarkable, that very shortly after this event, buildings of enormous magnitude, and evincing great skill and a scientific knowledge of masonry, were constructed in all the countries more immediately connected with the scene of the dispersion of man. It is only necessary to glance at a few — the remote antiquity and vastness of which will be at once remembered. The pyramids and labyrinth of Egypt, the cyclopean buildings of Tyrens in Greece, Volterra in Italy, the walls of Tyre and pyramids of Hindostan — all attest the early prevalence of the science and ruling spirit of masonry, derived from some one great original, and spread abroad by some memorable event, which might cause it to be a common idea, pervading countries so far remote and unconnected. How, then, was this architectural skill and unity of design preserved and propagated? At a time before the use of letters was supposed to have been revealed to mankind, and indeed until writing was common, there was only one mode of perpetuating any high degree of knowledge, requiring, to make it practical, the co-operation and skill of numbers, and which was not, like painting, sculpture, or poetry, a solitary art, and that was, by the institution of certain societies or mysterious brotherhoods of those possessed of the science, and into which persons, from time to time, might be initiated; and who thus, by a sort of corporate succession, never being wholly old or entirely new, could keep alive, by authentic tradition, all the knowledge and arts of the

founders. Indeed it has been well observed, that before the invention of letters mankind may be said to have been perpetually in their infancy, as the arts of one age or country generally died with their possessors. In Egypt and Hindostan the early rulers tried to prevent this tendency of the arts to perish, by forcing the son to follow the trade of the father, that the knowledge acquired by any one might be preserved by lineal succession. The corporate succession of associated craftsmen was much more effectual to this end. We find, then, in ancient history, traces of the early existence of scientific associations, or trades' unions, as I may term them; and these associations were quickly invested with the additional grandeur and importance derived from the invention or adoption of peculiar religious and mystic ceremonies, with which they were contrived to guard and connect their purely secular knowledge. Of these societies, one of the most important were the Etruscans, a people widely celebrated for their scientific acquirements and their mysterious religious rites and ceremonies, and who, long before the building of Rome, inhabited that part of Italy now known as Tuscany. Their very name is, by Michelet and others, perhaps rather fancifully, derived from the word turis, or tower, and indicated that they were a nation of builders; and the remains now existing of the labours of this very ancient and ingenious people, prove how well-merited was their name, if, indeed, derived from this Latin word. But any one who considers the history of mankind, the proneness to association and to mystery, the prevalence of those ancient huge buildings to which I have referred, requiring the exertion of scientific skill, and co-operation of numbers, must at once feel disposed to admit the probability, at least, of the existence, in the earliest ages of the world — the immediate postdiluvian times — of associated bodies of architects; and also from the known jealousy of all possessing any peculiar skill or science, the probability too of those associations keeping sacred this knowledge from all but a select and privileged few. It is, however, unnecessary to rest on probability only, as we can trace from history the early existence of associations, united by secret mysteries, jealously preserved from the vulgar, using certain religious ceremonies and mystic symbols, and bearing much resemblance to the present rites of Freemasonry; and once such societies originated, the adoption by craftsmen of similar mysteries, rites, and ceremonies would rapidly follow. And it so happens that in each ancient nation, distinguished for its early culture of architectural science, there existed mysterious brotherhoods of high consideration, requiring initiation by secret and appalling ceremonies, guarding the admission to the fraternity by a most rigid scrutiny; and some of these associations originated twelve or fourteen hundred years before the Christian era, and some centuries before the building of Solomon's Temple. A few

may be mentioned. The chief were those initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries, the Etruscan, the Cabiri, the priests of Egypt, and the disciples of Zoroaster and Pythagoras.

A short account of the Eleusinian mysteries, which have generally been esteemed the most ancient and most closely resembling Freemasonry, may prove interesting. Each of you will for himself readily compare them with those of our Craft and note the resemblance or difference. After a long ceremony of preparatory purification, continued during nine days, the candidate for initiation was admitted at night into a vast building. By a series of mechanical contrivances, he was apparently exposed to the terrors of an earthquake; and amid imitations of thunder and lightning, sudden darkness beset him, and hideous noises were heard around. After enduring much calculated to strike terror, or arrest attention, he was introduced into the sanctuary of the goddess Isis or Ceres, which was dazzlingly lit up, and he was then instructed in the meaning of the sacred symbols presented to his view. Significant passwords were then communicated to him, by which he might recognize the brethren, and a most solemn oath was administered that he never should divulge the mysteries in which he was then instructed to the uninitiated. His instruction in the mysteries was by successive stages or steps. Some have supposed that the members of this society were taught the unity of the Divine Being. This, however, is denied by others; but it is generally admitted that a morality much superior to that prevailing amongst the mass of the nation, and connected with a belief in a system of future rewards and punishments, and of the immortality of the soul, was inculcated. These mysteries were in high repute, and the greatest sages and philosophers were proud of their initiation.

We have thus, then, proof of the early existence of the two sources from which Freemasonry would naturally originate — of the general association and great skill of the eastern architects, and of organized societies, distinguished by peculiar knowledge, by signs, &c., and bound by solemn sanctions not to reveal their secrets to those not initiated. The adoption by the one body of signs, symbols, initiations and mysteries, similar to those of the other was so natural, as almost certain to take place at a very early period of the co-existence of the two societies — the associated craftsmen and the associated mysterymen. This tendency of all trades or professions to form separate societies, and to protect their knowledge and rights by initiation into secrets, by passwords of recognition &c., is not of modern date, but is coeval almost with history, and indeed arises from the vary nature of man. The jealousy, too, with which artistic secrets

were guarded, and all unlawful rivalry checked, may be illustrated by reference to the old fable of Daedalus, which, perhaps, has been, in another light, familiar to us from our pleasant school-boy days. This Daedalus, who is supposed to have lived more than three thousand years since, and whom some seek to identify with Tubal Cain, was an artist widely famed for his great ingenuity and skill in architecture and other kindred sciences. He was banished from his native country, Athens, for the murder of his nephew, Talus, who was his pupil, and whose growing genius so excited his uncle's jealousy, that he killed him. On his banishment, he was kindly received by Minos, king of Crete, and adorned that country with many incomparable edifices and monuments of his skill. This ancient tale has been explained by the greatest of modern philosophers, Lord Bacon, "as chiefly denoting the envy which strangely prevails amongst excellent artificers; for no kind of people are observed to be more implacable and destructively envious to one another than these." But I am inclined to imagine that a deeper truth lies hid in this "tradition old and dark," and that the murder by this mason of his pupil, which was imputed to his jealousy of superior skill, was, perhaps, the indignant punishment inflicted on the youth for divulging the secrets which he had learned under the instruction of this uncle. It is curious too, as not remote from the history of the incident which is by some writers alleged to have occurred at the building of the Temple — namely, the murder of the master-builder directing the execution of the works. It is, however, sufficient to refer to it as showing the extreme jealousy of the rivalry of other artists.

But though I am not about to discuss minutely the question of the literal or historical proof of the truth of the tradition which refers our origin to the reign of Solomon, and the events connected with the building of his famous Temple, I cannot, of course, exclude from my consideration all mention of his times, and the sacred country where our organization is supposed to have commenced. Certain it is that Tyre and Sidon, at the time of the erection of Solomon's Temple, were widely celebrated for the skill and excellence of their builders and masons. "None were also skilled to hew wood like the Sidonians;" and the buildings of those two most ancient cities were famed for their extent, beauty, and magnificence. The wisest of mankind deigned to apply for assistance, in executing the work which the Lord encouraged him to undertake, to the kindness of a neighbouring heathen king, who furnished him with builders and masons. I have before observed on the early prevalence of the separate organizations of the various crafts or trades; it was almost inevitable from the social nature of man, and the tendency of like to like. In Tyre and Sidon the craftsmen were

associated by mysterious rites and ceremonies. Their merchants, you will recollect, were honourable princes and large traffickers. They carried their peculiar mysteries with their merchandize to Asia Minor and the "Isles of Greece, where burning Sappho loved and sung," "where grew the arts of war and peace," and, in return, with the spurious liberality which ever distinguished Paganism, they readily admitted the worship of all the gods of the heathen, and the gorgeous and imposing ceremonies connected with their superstitions and mysteries. Now, in the district of Asia Minor, called Ionia, there existed, it would seem, even before the building of the Temple, a very remarkable fraternity, called the "Dionysian artificers." They were an association of scientific men, who possessed the exclusive privilege of erecting temples, theatres, and other public buildings in Asia Minor. They were a very numerous body, and existed under the same name in Syria (including Tyre and Sidon), Persia, and India. The members were particularly eminent for their scientific acquirements, and they possessed appropriate words and signs by which they could recognize their brethren. They were divided into lodges, which were called by different names. They occasionally held convivial meetings in houses erected and consecrated for the purpose, and each separate lodge was under the direction of a master, president, and warden. Once each year they held a festival of peculiar splendour and pomp. In their ceremonial observances particular utensils and implements were employed, some of which closely resembled, or were identical with those used by Freemasons. Their rules for the support of their poorer brethren, for securing general concord, and for the promotion of public and private virtues, so exactly coincide with those of our brotherhood, that writers, even the most hostile to the Craft, do not hesitate to ascribe to the Dionysian artists the origin of Freemasonry. In truth, these men were Freemasons; and scarcely any institution, pretending to antiquity, so nearly resembles its original foundation, as the body of Freemasons; their rites, rules, and orders, which have a known existence of some centuries, agree with the Dionysian builders, the parent stock from which they seem so clearly to have sprung, as even now to be almost identical with them. We may, then, be assured, that at the building of the Temple the skilful masons and architects, whose aid Solomon obtained, did belong to the fraternity I have just referred to and this pointed granted or established, the traditional origin of the re-organization of our even still illustrious and certainly very ancient Order, becomes, if not certain, at least sufficiently probable to receive a willing assent to its truth. The Syrian artificers brought to Jerusalem their science and their mysteries; from Jerusalem, the more illustrious city, these mysteries were propagated as from their original source.

This supposition receives additional confirmation from there being then in Judea a very peculiar society of Jews, with which the Dionysian artificers would readily blend and associate. This body of Jews were called the Essenes. Their tenets and distinctive ceremonies bore considerable resemblance to those of Freemasons; and they, too, had traditions and duties connected with the Temple. Conflicting opinions have been entertained by sacred and profane writers as to the origin of this singular sect — the Essenes; but all concur in representing them as a very ancient association, derived too, most probably, from some still more ancient fraternity, which, at the earliest period of history, existed in the land of Judea. The learned Scaliger, whose research and acuteness are well known, identifies this body with the Assideans or Kasideans, or the most noble Knights of the Temple, who were conspicuous in the glorious times of the Maccabees, and for many ages preceding. The strictest scrutiny was made into the character of every candidate for admission into this fraternity. If he was approved and accepted, a solemn oath was then administered to him, binding him never, even at the risk of life itself, to divulge the secrets of the Order, and he was also instructed in the religious traditions, derived from the earliest founders and members of the sect. They had particular signs by which they could recognise the brethren, and these bore a strong resemblance, as we learn, to those of Freemasons. They, too, were divided into lodges; and while they were honourably distinguished by the severe observance of the moral virtues, they were not neglectful of the social and convivial ties which give zest to life, and bind mankind together by the kindly instincts of human affections. This fraternity, which was not confined to architects, though the Assideans or restorers of the Temple held chief place amongst them, continued to flourish at the coming of our Saviour, and until the fearful destruction of Jerusalem made the whole nation of Jews outcasts, and even their very name a by-word and reproach. How readily would these two fraternities — the Dionysian builders and the Essenes — blend and amalgamate, and give rise to a new society combining features common to both, or but slight modifications of their respective peculiarities. This could scarcely fail to take place, and were history silent on all other mysterious organizations of men professing peculiar knowledge and distinctive doctrines, the origin of Freemasonry might, with some confidence, be attributed to, or perhaps more correctly be termed, a “variety” of the two fraternities of which I have thus given such a general outline. Some writers, who would seek to connect everybody of peculiar eminence in ancient or modern history with Freemasonry, either directly, or through the affinity of the Essenes, have laboured to prove that St. John and St. Paul both belonged to that sect of the Jews. They refer, for proof of

the latter, to the emphatic use by the apostle of the designation "brother" (Rom. Xvi. 23), describing Quartus as "a brother" (see all Coll. 1v. 9), not "his brother." Other passages, too, might be adduced, particularly those in which he tells of himself that he had lived a Pharisee "after the straitest sect of his religion," which it is argued were the Essenes: to the admonition that as he had, as a master-builder, laid the foundation, others should take heed how they built on this an improper superstructure. To this may be added one other passage, which, from the metaphorical form of expression having now become habitual, is likely not to excite attention, but which, I think, was used by the apostle more literally, and as referring to the society of which both the writer and the person to whom his epistle was addressed were members. I allude to 2 Tim. ii. 15, in which the apostle says — "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

I need not, however, dwell more particularly on these points, which are rather topics for curious argument than facts tending to the elucidation of our subject; and I shall proceed to notice one other society, philosophical or scientific in its pretensions, and, like the other two just mentioned, the Essenes and Dionysians, guarding the treasury of knowledge by secrecy and mystery. Pythagoras was a celebrated philosopher who lived in the sixth century before Christ. In the course of his extensive travels through Ionia, Syria, and Egypt, he had been initiated into all the famed mysteries of these kingdoms. It was a desire likely to arise in the mind of such a benevolent and reflective man, to form a perfect system of philosophy, by selecting from the systems into which he had been initiated, whatever seemed peculiarly excellent, and perhaps even improving on them. He settled in Crotona, in Italy, and there, about 550 B.C., founded a fraternity of disciples, called, after him, Pythagoreans. Before any one was received into the number of his disciples, a most rigid inquiry was made into his moral character. If the result was favorable, he was then bound by a solemn engagement to conceal from the uninitiated the mysteries and knowledge in which he might be instructed. The doctrines of charity, of universal benevolence, and of peculiar regard for the brethren of the order, were inculcated on the new disciple. The members were distinguished by wearing white garments as emblems of purity and innocence, and they had also particular words and signs by which they could recognise each other and correspond at a distance. They were advanced from one degree of knowledge to another, and they were instructed in arts and sciences, united with ethics and a system of theology; and this instruction was communicated to the initiated by cyphers and symbols. They were also strictly forbidden to commit their

secrets to writing, and relied on oral tradition only to preserve the knowledge of their mysteries. This philosophy, remembered now only by the familiar tenets of the transmigration of souls and avoidance of beans, exercised at one time much influence on the nations where it flourished, and was confessedly the means of greatly exalting the mind and moral character of the initiated. The noblest, wisest, and best of the nation were members, and, though suffering much persecution, they were eminently distinguished by the greatest fidelity in all their engagements, and their strict performance of all moral duties.

It will thus be observed how readily the more ancient mysteries, the Eleusinian and Essenian, furnished the germs of another kindred system, and this is the more important, as I cannot, indeed, shew the exact date or particular person first instituting Freemasonry, but only the existence of other systems naturally suggestive of it, and with which, in remote ages, it seems to have been blended. It would be impossible to trace accurately the successive stages of the transition or development of the mysteries of the Dionysian builders, and Essenes, and disciples of Pythagoras, into Freemasonry as now known and existing for at least seven or eight centuries. Transitions are like the growth of plants, gradual, almost imperceptible in daily accretions, remarkable only in the results; or, like those pictures called "dissolving views", in which the most minute attention cannot arrest the moment of the entire fading away of one picture or the substitution of another often wholly dissimilar; but it may not be without interest briefly to advert to some at least of the probable stages of this development.

It is a mistake into which many are led from the computation of time from the coming of our Lord, to suppose that a sudden change of habits, and customs, and of religion, was produced by that great event. The existence of our world we divide into two eras — that before, and that following Christ's coming upon earth, and the latter we call confusedly Christian times. But this is, indeed, an error. The spread of the Gospel was not either immediate or rapid. It was more like the morning stealing on the night, and melting the darkness. Centuries were required to change the inveterate habits, manners, customs, and religion of the nations, even where the pure Gospel of the Lord was first preached; and during three centuries the new religion was slowly spreading amidst many trials and frequent fiery persecutions of its members. The Heathen mysteries were ordinarily celebrated in the vast dominions of the Roman empire, and Paganism was the national form of worship, until Theodosius the Great, about the commencement of the fifth century, prohibited and tried wholly to extinguish the Pagan theology. It is, however, probable that the

mysteries were in many places secretly continued in spite of the severe edicts of the Emperor; and we are informed that even in Athens, the scene of St. Paul's great preaching, they were practised so late as the 8th century of our Christian era. The outcast Jews and recent Christian converts had also nearly the same motives for adopting some portions of the Essenian and Dionysian, or similar mysteries. Both Jews and Christians were persecuted, and it was essential to their safety to practise the rites and ceremonies of their respective religions in secret. The Christians were often obliged to resort, like the prophets of old, to holes and caves in the earth, and they had a church of the living amongst the tombs of the dead in the catacombs of Rome. How useful, then, would the adoption of secret signs and passwords of recognition be to these persecuted sects, and how probable was it that, to disarm suspicion, they outwardly adopted the ceremonies of paganism, in order to practise in security their Christian worship, without the intrusion or espial of the jealous persecuting multitude. In this was, I am inclined to think that the spirit and leading ideas of Freemasonry were adopted from the heathen mysteries by the early Christians. They were, indeed, then termed "churches", but for many centuries were more like "Lodges" of Freemasons, than we can now well believe, from the universality of the true religion in our own times; and, with the natural tendency of the human mind, they adopted whatever in the old mysteries was not incongruous, into the new, and, to the crown, apparently inscrutable religion. But there prevailed in Western Europe two very singular secret associations, with which the Eastern might, as the intercourse between the East and West increased. Readily incorporate, and form a new society or modification of the old, having many external and obvious points of resemblance, and exhibiting also many traits of a similar spirit and origin. These were, the Druidical religion prevalent in Gaul and Britain, and the Fehmgerichte, or secret tribunals of Westphalia and Germany. The Druidical religion was of great antiquity, and was a corruption most probably of a purer worship, mixed with the doctrines and practices derived from the Eleusinian mysteries and other ancient rites. This is supposed to have been introduced into Western Europe about 600 years, B.C., but continued in Britain for many centuries after the Christian era. The Fehmgerichte is said to have been instituted in the ninth century, and continued in full vigour to the middle of the fifteenth. I need not dwell particularly on either of these societies. Their existence in any country would naturally prepare the mind to receive with favour rites and ceremonies analogous to those, and with which they might be usefully combined.

It will thus be seen that those mysterious associations to which I have more particularly invited your attention, and which existed even anterior to the building of Solomon's Temple, continued to flourish to the eighth century of our era, and that there existed contemporaneously other fraternities having a certain family likeness, with which the more ancient might readily be incorporated, and, as it were, fused; and shortly after this date the fraternity of Freemasons became a known and powerful organization. The potentates of Europe, including popes, conferred on the fraternity of Freemasons most important privileges, and allowed them to be governed by laws, customs, and ceremonies peculiar to their order. We are told that the association was composed of men of all nations remarkable for their skill and practice of architecture. It spread throughout Central Europe, and the principles of the order were introduced into Scotland about the year A.D. 1140. About the same period, the practice and doctrines of Freemasonry were introduced into England, and the brethren in 1410 received a charter of incorporation, by the name and style of "The Freemasons." That name and style we bear, and are justly proud of our historic identity with our more ancient and honored incorporated brethren.

And now I trust it may appear sufficiently plain to any brother who has attended to the cursory and necessarily imperfect notices which I have given of the ancient, scientific, and mysterious fraternities, not only that they bore some resemblance to "Freemasonry," but, in truth, that Freemasonry is the direct descendant, the traditional offspring, corporate successors of those pre-Christian societies, the Essenes and Dionysian artificers. Habits, climate, race, the descent and gradual revolution through ages, the influence of a new and purer religion, would suffice to alter slightly the character, and impair somewhat the historical evidence of this identity or fusion; but sufficient yet remains to attest this most interesting fact, and to prove that we, even in the present position of the Craft, hold communion with the most glorious spirits of antiquity,

"Who leave, where they have passed, a line of light."

Time does not permit me to fill up this outline by the details of minute and striking coincidences between Freemasonry and the ancient mysteries to which I have alluded. My object, indeed, was rather to present you with a general sketch of these nearly-forgotten fraternities, to exhibit only those leading features and the prevailing motives acting on the human mind, from which all originated, and rapidly to trace through our Christian era the decline of the old, and the rise of the modern and more known system of Freemasonry, into

which the ancient has been changed. I trust, however, that even this rapid and cursory outline of the origin of Freemasonry may have awakened an interest in the minds of some of my brethren as to the evidences of the great antiquity of our Order; that they may feel some glowing connection with the most illustrious dead of the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans; that a feeling like pride of noble lineage and untarnished ancestry may elevate their minds, and induce them to aspire to elevate the Order also, to that consideration it once deservedly enjoyed. Then, indeed, might we boast that Freemasonry was the humble handmaid of our Pure Religion, and thus prove its identity with those associations of men who, in dark ages, ere the Day-star from on high had visited this earth, endeavoured to walk uprightly, by the dim light still retained of the religious impressions originally implanted and "left as a guide," and who, in centuries long gone by,

"Kept the truth so firm of old,
When our forefathers worshipped stocks and stones."

The spirit which animated them to struggle earnestly to free themselves from the corrupting influence which debased the ancient Polytheism, and which originated those mysterious societies, still exists. The associations organized by these earnest-minded men for the improvement of their fellows, as moral and intellectual beings, have fallen into oblivion, but in the system of Freemasonry, derived, as I trust has been shewn, from their noble efforts to elevate the thoughts and feelings of mankind their spirit still lives and flourishes, combines with, and even ministers to, Christianity. How wonderful is this connection of the past and of the present!

"How wonderful, that even
The passions, prejudices, interest
That sway the meanest being, the weak touch
That moves the first nerve,
And in one human brain
Causes the faintest thought, becomes a link
In the great chain of nature!"

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**FREEMASONS'
FEMALE ORPHAN SCHOOL**

Burlington-Place, Upper Baggot-Street
Dublin

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