

# *Approaching the Narrows*

—

ESSAYS ON AMERICAN FREEMASONRY

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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His interest in Freemasonry dates from his years in the Order of DeMolay where he garnered many distinctions including being selected Most Outstanding DeMolay in his chapter by the Grand Lodge F&AM of Florida. He was elected State Master Councilor for Florida in 1966, is a Past Commander of Central Florida Court of Chevaliers and a Past illustrious Knight Commander of Central Florida Priory, Order of Knighthood.

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# WHITHER INDEED ARE WE TRAVELING?

*By William Stemper*

"If Masons knew more about the history of the Fraternity, they would be better Masons" has long been a dictum of Masonic educators and an aim of Masonic education. Books have been written, research lodges founded, and lectures endowed and given as a result of this principle and the Craft has become culturally richer as a result. Yet, today, the vast number and percentage of Freemasons remain uninformed about the real history of the Craft, and while they suspect its antiquity and venerable tradition is a great one, few lodge members have a sense of its genuine value or how to appropriate it for Masonic and personal purposes; that is, to make their Masonic and personal experiences richer and more meaningful.

Much has been written about valuable and lasting education being intimate and personal.<sup>1</sup> Knowledge at its best and most effective is not absorption of inert data, facts and events. It is, rather, the transmission of information in a context which transforms both the person educated, and the educator, within an environment which is hospitable to both. Further, it utilizes a specific method which understands the dynamic of the educational process to be one of "shifting perception" or "receding horizon," not, by contrast, an idea grasped as true or "false" once and for all. Knowledge at its best, then, is intuitive and deals with changing arrangements of available data even more than it does new information, data or ideas.<sup>2</sup>

Relatively few Masons and non-Masons realize the immense intellectual and educational significance of Freemasonry in this regard. Freemasonry is not only the oldest, non-religious (in the formal sense of religion) moral tradition in the west, preserving certain basic concepts and ideas of biblical, classical, medieval, 16th/17th Century occult,<sup>3</sup> and Enlightenment periods and thus of general significance in the history of ideas, it is also a method of education which is both intimate and personal in character and loyal to a dynamic of "shifting perception" and "receding horizon." In both its content and its method, it is a tradition of great potential value to those who properly understand and use it.

How might Masonic education and scholarship, including the writing of Masonic history, be more effective and contribute to the overall revival of the Craft in the future?

First, we should understand the obstacles to such a process. Every institution has always been subject to the natural process of becoming less aware of the purposes for which it was founded. Freemasonry is



no exception. Today's Masonic Fraternity has become laden with an outdated honors system, a large and cumbersome system of homes for the aged, temples, and a multitude of appendant bodies, all of which tend to obscure the original purposes reflected in the Grand Lodge "revival" of 1717 and before. Even our best talents and minds come to be deflected by the pursuit of honors or the responsibility of administration.

Another obstacle to revitalizing the process of Masonic education is the fact that few Freemasons are aware that the Fraternity does contain a venerable tradition derived from the history of western ideas and the origin of western consciousness. They are not aware of its possibilities and, specifically, they are not aware of its unique structure and nature as both an institutional and structural reality of the highest sophistication; the degree system alone and its relationship to certain principles in the history of ideas (forms of neo-Platonism, e.g. "The Great Chain of Being") for example; nor are they aware that this objective and external structure is itself related to certain subjective and interior realities which themselves are linked to the whole history of the collective human experience as it has been recorded in research, in anthropology, and in the history of religions.<sup>4</sup>

In a further sense, an obstacle to vital Masonic education is our relative unawareness of the cultural milieu surrounding the development of Freemasonry. Masonic "history" has largely been the chronicling of the history of Masonic institutions without broader reference to the world around those institutions. Lodge histories are rarely more than digests and summaries of minutes, just as Masonic research is mostly antiquarianism or local history. Only lately have non-Masonic historians begun to take the history of the Craft seriously and this, as yet, has not filtered in and through Freemasonry.<sup>5</sup>

In a related way, the two major schools of Masonic writing in the past century and a half, although they have made unique and valuable contributions to our understanding of the Craft, have, in their own ways, intimidated members of the Fraternity as a whole from emulating their examples. The first such school (not a "school" in the sense of having been founded by one person but rather by similarity of approach to its subject matter) is typified by Albert Gallatin Mackey (1807-1881) and Albert Pike (1809-1891) who, although a physician and lawyer/jurist respectively, were more or less professional Freemasons interested in the more occult and arcane side of the Craft. Pike, especially, was convinced that one could not or should not attempt to understand Freemasonry without reference to its rites, symbols and ideas which pre-dated the institution's actual history, which his **Morals and Dogma** (1871) reflects. As has been pointed out, this effort was not without its modern value<sup>6</sup> and it, no doubt, assisted Pike in the building of the Supreme Council, AASR, SMJ which has become one of the great and influential Masonic institutions of the present day. Yet, the sheer enormity of Pike's linguistic and mythological erudition has made

his work one of the greatest un-read works of our time, especially among Scottish Rite Masons.

The other major school, modeled after the work of Robert Freke Gould (1836-1915), and William James Hughan (1841-1911) to a lesser extent, has likewise **not** been a major stimulus to Masonic education at large. Since the publication of Gould's *History of Freemasonry* (1885) and the foundation of Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076 in London (1886), this school, and those influenced by it in the United States, e.g., Henry Wilson Coil, Alphonse Cerza and Ray V. Denslow, has contributed greatly to the fund knowledge about Freemasonry *qua* separate tradition and single institution. It has also dispelled many myths and falst notions about the Craft innocently touted by earlier writers, e.g., The Rev. George Oliver (1782-1867), Mackey and others, and fostered the founding of other eminent research lodges throughout the world (American Lodge of Research, Missouri Lodge of Research, Research Lodge No. 2 of Iowa, Research Lodge of Otago, New Zealand, *et. al.*) which have attempted similar goals. Yet, the ordinary Freemason remains largely unaffected by the technical approach to Masonic scholarship and the vast amount of information produced by "QC" and others has not been put into effective teaching modes within lodge systems of Masonic education.

Such obstacles should not discourage the political and intellectual leadership of the American Craft from attempting a more vital program of lodge education. Rather, if they are accurately and clearly understood, they can provide important insights about the past from which we might learn for the future. More significantly, and perhaps ironically, as the numbers of Masons decrease, as is the present trend in the United States and Canada, resistance to trying new forms and approaches should also decrease as the leaders of the Fraternity become more concerned about and committed to the Masonic education of the individual Freemason.

Of what might a new approach to Masonic education and history consist? Upon this question depends in large measure the future vitality and promise of the Fraternity and, indeed, the survival of Freemasonry as a vital element in Western culture.

First, as has been recently demonstrated at National Masonic Week in Washington, February 15, 1980, there is no substitute for re-instituting the Festival of the Common Board into the process of Masonic education. The 1980 meeting of The Philalethes Society, under the direction of its President, Dwight L. Smith, F.P.S., utilized the format of an "Annual Assembly and Feast" to present, in table lodge form, the concept of *the ideal lodge*, a combination of toasts and responses designed to illuminate the significance of the Masonic tradition and within a socially convivial context. If other groups, lodges and bodies attempted similar events, the Masonic education process would be greatly enhanced.

Further, it is increasingly important for lodges to indicate to their new and present members that the Masonic institution is a result of the whole history and development of western ideas and consciousness and



not just another fraternal organization that engages in charitable and social practices. Freemasonry bears the imprint of several climates of ideas, forms of perception, states of consciousness and awareness, all of which is reflected in its symbolism and ritual. Local Masonic education should relay this fact to the members of the Craft in ways that they can understand and appreciate.

Thirdly, it is especially important today to convey the sense, in programs of Masonic education, that Masonic ritual and symbolism describes **reality** in human experience. The whole progression of Masonic initiation, especially the degrees of the York Rite, frequently termed "The Ancient Craft of Freemasonry," discloses a saga of human development from birth to death, light to darkness in both positive (the search for the **Word**, the essence of human aspiration as the ineffable name of God) and negative (the threats of falling away from the light in ruffianship) terms. Both the opportunities and the pitfalls of human existence are allegorically described in a system of profound depth and sophistication. Current research, for example, in the developmental stages of male development are significantly presaged in the process of the initiate from youth (EA) through maturity (FC) to full age (MM) and all in a gradual process of increasing discovery of self and the world.<sup>8</sup> The lasting human proclivity to confuse appearance for reality, to impatiently seize what, in due time, is to come to the faithful, and the persistent vision of a unified experience of God, Man and Universe — all — reflect important and basic spiritual and psychological elements which have illuminated human experience for centuries. Local Masonic education would immensely benefit if these elements and realities were made **avident** to the initiate and to members of lodges.

Lastly, Masonic education should avoid the tendency to identify scholarship and learning with the specialist and the "expert." Every man seeks the twin goal of security and success in the material aspects of life, together with personal development and meaning in his existence. He, knowingly or otherwise, is on a pilgrimage toward the establishment of rich and sound linkages with life and with others around him, parents, wives, friends and children. Masonic education would be most successful, both for the Craft as a voluntary society and as an institution and for the individual Freemason, if it actively pursued the actualization of the talents, resources and abilities of the individual within the lodge. If, in short, the local lodge became a place where the Freemason would, and could, become more nearly what he might be as a satisfied and fulfilled human being.

There are at least three ways in which lodges and other bodies might achieve this. First, it is essential that lodges be directed and managed by a system which includes an effective educational process. This means that a committee structure of a lodge or other local body should reflect an effort to use men for what they can do best<sup>9</sup> for their own development **and** for the lodge **at the same time**. Ritualists should do the degree work and good public speakers and managers should direct the



affairs of the lodge, especially the greeting of new members and the care and retention of present members. Those interested in ideas should teach about the Craft in all of its aspects. The lodge which draws its Masters and Wardens from among men who excel in each of these three aspects will grow and be strong.

Secondly, sound and practical ways for Masons to live their obligation to support and care for one another should be discussed and implemented. Fraternal love cannot, of course, be "engineered" as part of a process of Masonic education. Yet, open and frank discussions of both the problems and opportunities of active fraternalism should be on the agendas of lodges. What is the role of material support and relief? How can men spend creative and supportive time together with one another in a society which makes competition a social norm? What role does mentorship play in Freemasonry, i.e., an older adult male encouraging a younger adult male in his career and life development? What are the practical ways men might cooperate in enterprises and projects which foster a "win/win" rather than a "win/lose" mentality? How might the lodge become an active and genuine community of men in a given city, suburb and town, especially recalling that the "Craft" in actual terms is more in and about the world than it is in lodge communications.

Thirdly and lastly, as part of an active and vital process of Masonic education, lodges should take the life experience of the individual Freemason seriously,<sup>10</sup> and in specific terms, use it as the point of departure for the whole process of educating, orienting and assimilating the Mason into lodge life. A man should be called upon at some point in his Masonic experience to reflect upon and, *if possible, to write about* the important experiences in his own life. In time, he should be encouraged to relate these experiences to the Craft, its aims, purposes and meaning.

Personally, it was of deep importance to my own Masonic education to reflect on the various stages of my commitment to the Fraternity. Further, it was useful to group these into steps along the way to active involvement in particular Masonic activities. As a youthful DeMolay, Master Councilor, Illustrious Knight Commander and State Master Councilor, I was impressed with the idealism of Masonic tradition and wholly and somewhat uncritically appropriated it. Later, as a college and graduate student of the late sixties engaged in the crises and causes of the era, I temporarily and cynically rejected the Craft for the contradiction between its ideals and its practices (a tension which I still hold in mind). Lastly, and perhaps not conclusively, I worked toward a more realistic and constructive commitment to Freemasonry which resulted in the founding of The Goose and Gridiron Club of New York and the recruitment of a number of young men to active or more active involvement in the process of Masonic re-vitalization. I am sure that my Masonic experience along the way would have been richer and more complete if an educational process had existed which recognized and affirmed this essential process of maturing commitment to a style of life and

to the institution which promotes it.

In conclusion, let me say that the future survival and growth of Freemasonry depends decisively on the educational process within it. This process must be essentially personal in approach, taking seriously the obstacles involved to its implementation; and it should recognize the inherent value and richness of the Masonic tradition itself. It should reflect sound lodge management and avoid the tendency to specialize Masonic learning and scholarship beyond the reach or interest of the member. Most importantly, it must take the life-story of the individual Freemason with great seriousness and use this story as the point from which his journey to the Light begins along its life-long path.

## REFERENCES

1. This view is reflected in Alfred North Whitehead's *Aims of Education* and in the work of Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*. See especially Richard Gelwick, *The Way of Discovery: An Introduction to the Thought of Michael Polanyi*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 48-49. Also, Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, Chicago, 1958, Chapters V, VI.
2. Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, 1970, makes this point persuasively. See Chapter IV, *passim*. Cf., especially Masonic concepts of "being brought to light," "approaching the East in due and ancient form," and the passing of the veils ceremonies in the American Royal Arch to Kuhn's use of changing paradigms of scientific knowledge.
3. See Francis Yates, "Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry," *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, Boulder, Shambhala, 1978, pp. 206-233.
4. See various works by Mircea Eliade, Lionel Tiger and Victor Turner, for the general direction of this form of study. Also, Abner Cohen, "The Politics of Ritual Secrecy," *Man, The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, September 1971, Vol. 6, pp. 427-448, for a comparison of Freemasonry with tribal initiation and secret societies in Sierra Leone.
5. Yates, *work cited*, and *The Art of Memory*, The University of Chicago Press, 1966. Also, J.M. Roberts, *The Mythology of Secret Societies*, New York, Charles Scribners' Sons, 1972.
6. Robert B. Watts, "Feed the Hungry," Washington, The Supreme Council, 33°, A.A.S.R., 1978.
7. Dwight L. Smith, "Why this Confusion in the Temple?" and "Whither Are We Traveling?," Washington, The Masonic Service Association of the United States, in addition to numerous editorials in *The Indiana Freemason*, has spoken eloquently to the need for Table Lodges and other means to return to the first principles of Freemasonry.
8. See Daniel J. Levinson, et. al., *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1978.
9. For this insight, I am grateful to Dr. Glen Nygren, Dean of Students, Lehmann College, City University of New York, through his assistant, John M. Hilliard, M.P.S.
10. Kenneth Keniston in *Youth and Dissent: The Rise of A New Opposition*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1971, and other works, argues that we do not know enough about the stage of life between adolescence and full adulthood and, thus, our institutions have been unable to adapt to stresses and requirements placed upon them.



# RELIQUARY FOR THE DEFENSE

By William Stemper

The Masonic Fraternity as we know it is changing. The point is not a new one. The topic is commonplace in conferences of Grand Masters and in countless lodges throughout the United States. It is increasingly difficult to ignore the reality of decline in membership and interest among members and non-members.

It seems to me that there is considerable value in looking carefully at the chief aspects of this decline in order to understand what can be done to restore vitality to the lodges and to the Craft as a whole. On the surface, the decline is three-fold: numerical, sociological, and intellectual. Each of these aspects are interrelated and should not be considered reasons for decline in the sense of **cause**. They are a set of means by which to evaluate, critically, the phenomenon of Freemasonry's deterioration and to expose possibilities for renewal and renovation.

First, and most obvious, most Grand Lodges in the United States have sustained serious losses in membership since the beginning of the last decade. These losses have been: decline of actual membership, rapidly increasing deaths and fewer initiations. The absolute number of lodge members has declined **and** the Fraternity has failed to attract replacements sufficient to offset deaths, resignations and suspensions or to keep up with the growth in the nation's population. The result has been fewer and older members with decisive implications for the overall health and character of the Fraternity.

Two exceptions should be noted. First, a few Grand Lodges continue to show net gains. Most of these are in the American South, in areas which are rural or suburban in social and cultural organization. They could be said to "prove" the rule in that these slight gains are in the least populous states and in areas which do not reflect national demographic patterns. One state in particular, Florida, has had substantial gains but a close look at the *Proceedings* of the Grand Lodge through the sixties and seventies reveals that the rate of initiations is falling behind the death rate and that transfers and demits into the state represent a shift in Masonic population rather than an increase in absolute numbers.

A second exception, related to Freemasonry's various appendant bodies, is that the Shrine (AAONMS) and both Supreme Councils of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite have shown net gains in the past few years.\* Since 1960, combined Scottish Rite membership has advanced from about 800,000 to approximately 1,000,000. These increases, however, have drawn from the large reservoir of Master Masons who have remained unattached to concordant bodies and who have been attracted to the

\*More recently AAONMS & AASR, NMJ are declining.

"higher degrees." Other Masonic organizations have had spectacular declines in membership, notably general grand York Rite bodies and the Grotto. Accurate figures on the effect of senior members of the Order of DeMolay joining Freemasonry are difficult to assess and would probably not offset the overall membership drop even if every DeMolay petitioned a Masonic lodge.

The sociological aspect of the decline of American Freemasonry relates to two identifiable phenomena in the lifestyle of Americans. The first is that "the Masons" grew to their greatest strength when the United States was essentially a rural-agrarian nation (e.g. 1919-1929) or when population patterns reflected small town or suburban organization (e.g. 1945-1960). The lodge itself was an indispensable social component of the small community in the past. The lodge system has not been able to adapt itself to an increasingly urban or "ex-urban" environment of the post-war metropolis. Bodies which have survived the transition, such as the Scottish Rite and the Shrine, have been regionally organized and have concentrated on large classes and membership campaigns. The so-called decline of the nuclear family and the rise of a young professional's class and "singles" lifestyle have also worked against the lodge system's continued success. A Masonic affiliation is an exceptional rather than a normal aspect of the young American male's life.

Further, "voluntary association," of which Freemasonry and the Church are two conspicuous examples, has suffered an increasing decline in the United States. Public affairs have become increasingly "public" along with the growth of the media while individual's private lives have become removed from social and community centers. This has been a function of increasing affluence. It remains to be seen what a downward spiral in the economy will mean to the American instinct to "belong." At present, however, public institutions such as government and corporate industry appear to have become removed and autonomous of local social and community centers and equally removed from the ordinary life and meaning system of the adult American male. When not engaged in the profession or business of which he is part, the male, in turn, has become more oriented to possibilities of personal development, recreation and pleasure not commonly available in a traditional Masonic lodge.

The third aspect of American Freemasonry's decline is intellectual or symbolical. The Craft as we know it was born in the early 18th Century (Grand Lodge of England, founded 1717) and bears to us directly, through "landmark" and ceremonial, a world view and ideational system which was very much at home in the court or salon of Enlightenment England, France or Germany. In its English and American history, Freemasonry became imminently respectable and upper middle class. On the continent, lodges tended toward the spirit of the **Philosophes** and the French Revolution of 1789 and became overtly anti-clerical and political, often patronized by intellectual elites, while suppressed by monarchial and papal governments. After 1800, the Fraternity in the United States and in England (and later the British Empire and



its colonies) retained the same essential set of ideas of an earlier period yet came to use those ideas in substantially different ways than in the beginning of the Grand Lodge era or on the European continent. In time, the continental brethren, too, became somewhat domesticated and established.

This new use can be understood in part through the pens of two non-Masons, Edmund Wilson and Roger Peyrefitte, writing with considerable historical knowledge and with a perspective Masonic scholars do not exhibit.

Wilson in his classic study of the revolutionary tradition in Europe, *To The Finland Station* (Garden City, NY, Doubleday, 1953, p. 411), comments that Freemasonry was an attempt on the part of European artisans of the 17th century to preserve a system of ethics which was threatened by the break-up of social institutions in the period. As a self-contained set of ideas in structural and ceremonial form, it signaled the death of a social order rather than a living social reality and, therefore, served an essentially conservative cultural function.

Peyrefitte, a novelist, underscores this function in his popular story of post World War II Vatican politics, *The Knights of Malta* (London, Panther Books, 1960, p. 76), with the following dialogue regarding the Roman Catholic Church's historic opposition to the Craft:

Msgr. Stockalper: "It (Freemasonry) was the forerunner of the revolutionary spirit...."

Msgr. Heim: "Yesterday's revolutionaries are tomorrow's conservatives. I have made a study of Freemasonry, Monsignor. It is one of the last bastions of social conservatism in the world and, consequently, of religious conservatism....clearly Rome is behind the times...."

The point both writers make is that the Craft's intellectual and symbolical character lent itself to co-option exploitation by conservative social forces to the extent that such an oft-quoted Masonic dictum as "the brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God" became effectually meaningless beyond the walls of the lodge itself. Freemasonry's decline has been marked by a defense of conservative virtues which have been idealized if not always practiced; or if, indeed, they have been practiced, they have served to cut off the Craft from the changing reality of the world around it. The most telling evidence for this observation in the United States are certain practices in membership selection.

When the nation has become increasingly pluralistic, reflecting a confluence of cultures and colors, American Freemasonry remains middle class and white. The intellectual and symbolical history of Freemasonry in Britain and the United States must be understood in terms of the use of egalitarian principles as an ideology for the preservation of white,

upper middle class values. Where British Masonry has been transplanted, the values, if not the skin color, have remained unchanged. (See Abner Cohen, "The Politics of Ritual Secrecy," *Man*, Vol. 6, September, 1971, pp. 427-448, for a highly useful study of Creole Freemasonry in Sierra, Africa, as a means for preserving European values amidst Black nationalism).

As unhopeful as the numerical, sociological and intellectual-symbolical decline of Freemasonry is to the thoughtful Mason, there is, it seems, considerable hope implicit in the very functional aspect of the Craft which has been susceptible to co-option. The basis of this hope is that the experience of Freemasonry is still abundantly rich with the potentiality for brotherhood precisely because it has preserved, as a "bottom line" virtue, the integrity of brotherhood among its members. The richness has much to do with the character of the ritual, particularly the drama of the third degree but, more especially, it relates to the structural shelter the lodge provides for persons of divergent opinions and backgrounds to interact creatively. While there is little hope that statistics will be reversed or that patterns of community living in this country will become once more susceptible to "lodgeism", there is always the human fact that men will want to know and appreciate one another apart from the competition and aggression of conventional business and professional life.

The intrinsic value of Freemasonry that remains in the early 1980's is that it is still a corporate structure which can accommodate the fraternal needs of highly individualist men in a context of overall unity. Its structure is adaptable to pluralism even if its present membership is not.

Pluralism within a structure of unity remains the most valuable offering of Freemasonry to the modern, technological world and, as such, it is a goal which every Masonic lodge should identify and work for in pragmatic and structural ways. This is especially the case for urban lodges that have suffered acute membership losses in recent years and which no longer exist in social contexts conducive to the health of an upper middle class lodge experience as is still partly available in suburban and exurban settings.

A lodge in New York City, for example, should be aware that it exists in an area surrounded by many ethnic groups, each of which contain large numbers of articulate and sensitive young persons who might well be attracted to the Masonic Fraternity if they can be made to feel comfortable, appreciated and useful. Such persons will not be attracted to a lodge if it appears to be dominated by values intrinsically alien to their own, or which will force them to deny their own past personal experiences and heritage. A successful urban Masonic lodge of the 1980's should comprehend that the realistic grounds for its survival will be the willingness to accept diversity among its membership and sufficient flexibility in structure to allow younger members from varied backgrounds to participate actively in the decision-making



processes of the lodge. Should it refuse to make such a recognition and act accordingly, Freemasonry, at least in larger American cities, will become a reliquary for the defense of a dead past and a lost prestige.

# UNIVERSALITY AND MASONIC ETHICS

*By William Stemper*

Most Freemasons are accustomed to thinking about the ethics of the Fraternity in terms of their obligations. The specific ties that bind members of the Craft to one another, to their families and to the Fraternity, contained in the various oaths members take during ceremonies of initiation do, indeed, provide the core of Masonic morality, and in Masonic law, bind the individual Mason in structural and organization ways. Yet, Masonic ethics transcends the individual's obligation. As reflection about the moral meaning of behavior, Masonic ethics is the consideration of "what it means" to be a Freemason in every aspect, not just those items particularly mentioned in the rituals of admission.

In this point lies the greatness of the Craft. If Freemasonry were **only** a society of men with particular stated obligations, the meaning of Freemasonry would not extend into the world of the non-Mason, the world in which Freemasonry lives as a fraternal institution. The links between the Craft and the "profane" world would be thin and not probably very important in terms of the Fraternity's impact upon the whole of society, in the United States in particular.

The truly salient point about Freemasonry is that its ethical teachings are culturally universal. Its "mission" escapes the narrow and the specific and extends into the general, and, indeed, in terms of Masonic philosophy, the "universal." Masonic ethics, in fact, is rooted in the universal as a norm and as an ideal for the role of society, not just for the men who by circumstance and conviction find themselves members of the lodges of the order.

What is the universal? Succinctly, in Masonic terms, it is the fundamental concept that all men, and by implication women, are members of the human family, equally dignified as God's children. It is the concept, rooted in philosophical Platonism, that this common condition is not only **true** in terms of the actuality of ethical insight, but is also an **ideal**, a "landmark" toward which individuals and the Fraternity as a whole progress. Freemasonry, as is said in the tradition, is a "progressive science." It is only only a society of "progressive" members, it is, as an institution, a system of morality which claims universality as its ultimate objective and aim. The idealism of the ritual, the tradition, and the structure of the society, all, purport to aspire and move toward an order in which all are "brothers" under a single divine Father and all are due justice and fraternity regardless of setting or background.

Universality, then, is a highly important if little understood concept within the Masonic Fraternity. Its idealism is, perhaps, more frequently



comprehended as abstract principle than is the ethical reality itself. The consideration that Freemasonry might well have a latent influence upon culture as a **symbol** of universality is conceivably even more remote in ordinary thought than the more or less accepted notion that Masons have a responsibility to "society," a **moral** responsibility apart from the ties that bind all citizens.

Universality when properly understood represents a unique aspect of Freemasonry as a fraternal organization. No other society, with the exception of the Christian church, has refined the ideal to such a high level of self-consciousness or sophistication as have various Masonic groups since the founding of the institution as it is presently known (ca.1717). The point is that universality is the lodestone of Masonic ethics. It calls the Freemason to social consciousness and responsibility; it beckons the Craft as an institution to be a progressive influence within society; and, most importantly, it exists as a symbol of the state and nature of human existence, both as it actually is and as it should become. As an ethical resource for the reflective Freemason, universality is a most useful fraternal and philosophical tool. With such tools, the greatness of the Craft is constructed.

# THE PROMISE AND THE VISION

*By William Stemper*

The purpose of this essay is to relate what I have come to believe to be an increasingly important **method** of Masonic thinking and intellectual craftsmanship and to do so within the context of a particular life story. This method is the treatment of Freemasonry in terms of its dual nature as both an external system of institutions, ideas, beliefs, morals, values, signs, symbols and ceremonies, **and** an internal system of personal development and maturation. The Fraternity is, then, in short, both what we see around us on the objective and empirical plane and what we feel within us on the subjective and interior level. To fully comprehend the nature and purpose of the Craft, we should, therefore, grasp that we are considering not only the history of an institution which began at the beginning of the Grand Lodge era (1717) but also a chart of internal human awareness and consciousness which produced that system of moral reflection and teaching which became institutionalized into modern Freemasonry.

In one sense, therefore, it is important that there have been two major schools of Masonic history since the Grand Lodge era began. One of these, typified by such figures as Robert Freke Gould (1836-1915) and William J. Hughan (1841-1911), has been termed the Realist or factual school. Another, though not a school in the sense of having been founded by a particular person but rather as having been shaped by common insights and ideas, might be said to be characterized by the writings of Albert Gallatin Mackey (1807-1881) and Albert Pike (1809-1891). The first school has held the belief that an empirical and factual rendering of Masonic events constitutes an ample history of the institution. The second, especially in Pike's **Morals and Dogma** (1871), would not necessarily deny the first but would go further: Masonic history is not only a history of events and actions, or even the institutional development of lodges and grand lodges, it is rather the whole history of all that contained within Freemasonry, including those rites, symbols, ideas and concepts which pre-date the foundation of the modern speculative Fraternity.

It is safe to say that almost all historians since these two groups have taken one side or another. The more respected and respectable in both the United States and Great Britain have generally adhered to the values of Gould and Hughan. In this country, Ray V. Denslow, Henry Wilson Coil and Alphonse Cerza stand out because each has seen himself as a dispeller of non-historical myths advanced by overly zealous and enthusiastic brothers who would give the Fraternity more antiquity or historical eminence, as, for example, in the American Revolution, than it warrants. Others who have concentrated on local or state histories, such as James A. Case and Dwight L. Smith, have also tended to follow



the realist school. The result is that Mackey and Pike have been downplayed as Masonic historians and uplifted as important, though somewhat eccentric, philosophers or interpreters of the symbolism of the Craft.

We are now in a period of Masonry's development when both schools need to be re-examined for the value they hold for the future of Freemasonry and the tools they provide to fathom the meaning and relevancy of the Fraternity for the present and future era. To suggest such a re-evaluation is not to deny the validity of either school in terms of its own contribution or even to deemphasize the primary contribution made by the Gould men and their decedents, a contribution institutionalized in the prestige and usefulness of the premier lodge of Masonic research, Quator Coronati No. 2076. We are, doubtlessly, much further along in our Masonic self-understanding as a result of the decades of objectivity provided by the more empirical approach and, thus, as a result, nearer to a re-interpretation than we would have been if we had accepted at face value the observations made by Mackey and Pike as real Masonic history.

What might this new method of approach to Masonic history consist of? In the simplest terms, it would be an increasing willingness on the part of those who read, think and write about the history of Freemasonry to grasp and utilize the elements which produced the external and empirical side of the Craft which we take, largely, to be the only history of the Fraternity. It would be to (1) understand Freemasonry in terms of the whole history and development of western ideas and consciousness; how the Craft changed in certain different climates of ideas and what forms of perception, consciousness and awareness can be seen at the various stages of the development of its symbolism and ritual. Further, (2) it would be a fresh willingness to take seriously, comprehend and perhaps re-appropriate certain basic symbols, motifs and ideas contained in the Masonic ritual as we see it now. This would mean that we examine Freemasonry's symbols for what they tell us about recurring elements in human experience, especially in the human subconscious. This would also mean a closer examination and awareness of the role these symbols may have played in preserving certain classical insights, experiences and feelings which modern man may have, in the main, lost common touch with. In this sense, one would do well to examine certain basic interpretations of the history of symbolism contained in the writings of psychologist C.G. Jung and historian of consciousness, Erich Neumann, who draws on Jung for his fundamental ideas. Similarly, the work of Joseph Campbell on mythology and its relation to consciousness would be important. Further, the most exciting work of Francis A. Yates, particularly *The Art of Memory* (Chicago, 1966), points to insights in the history of ideas which Masonic scholars should be increasingly aware of because they tie the Craft to antiquity which both Gould and Mackey would have appreciated.

Yet, still further, a fresh approach to method in Masonic history would (3) take the experience of the individual Freemason seriously

and understand that experience as the raw material for understanding the development and meaning of the Craft. We know far more today than we ever have about the stages of a man's life, why men do certain things at certain times, and what appeal, or lack of appeal, Freemasonry might have to a man in a given period of his own development. This work would be more narrowly psychological and, in some instances, anthropological in the sense that (a) linkages might be sought between Freemasonry's three degree system and its tie to human development: Entered Apprentice equals Youth; Fellow Craft equals Middle Age; Master Mason equals Old Age, and (b) the relationship between Freemasonry and certain elements of tribal initiation and rites of passage found in more primitive cultures (see for example a comparison between Freemasonry and a primitive trial rite in Sierra Leone, Abner Cohen, "The Politics of Ritual Secrecy," *Man: The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Volume 6, September 1971, pp. 427-448). In both instances, the Masonic historian would look for strata below the ordinary — first, for the self-understanding which gave existential meaning to the three degree system as it emerged in the middle speculative period, that is, why did it appeal to the Freemason of the 1750's?; and, second, given the fact that the Fraternity has, almost astonishingly, prospered in every civilized clime, it may have had an appeal to men in industrial and scientific age which was satisfied in more primitive periods by tribal initiations.

It is in this latter sense that I have found particular and personal appeal in Freemasonry and which has led me to take the Craft seriously *in every aspect*; and which, in numerous ways, has led me to a commitment which I anticipate to understand this unique institution, its history, symbolism and development. Along this line of personal inquiry, I would like to conclude this essay and give testament to what I believe to be the essential key to understanding the Craft: its external/objective and internal/subjective elements, not one without the other.

My experience of Freemasonry has been three-fold in its development, and while I am still relatively young (33), I do not anticipate that these three divisions will substantially change either in my view of them or in the ways I have experienced their impact on my own development. These stages are (1) idealism/acceptance; (2) cynicism/rejection; and (3) realism/appropriation.

I. Idealism/Acceptance. Between the ages of 13 and 22, my experience of the Craft, through active membership in the Order of DeMolay, family associations and avid reading, led me to place a very high expectation on the nature of the Fraternity. As a DeMolay, I enthusiastically advanced up the ranks, becoming Master Councilor (1963), Illustrious Knight Commander (1965) and State Master Councilor of the Order of DeMolay in Florida (1966-67). I was invested a Chevalier and received numerous other awards afforded to active members. Despite the fact that DeMolay was not popular in my local high school and college activities (Key Club, Student Council and Government, Fraternity, Scholar-



ship honoraries). DeMolay, and through it Freemasonry, took my primary commitment. Certain incidents in my family life underscored the fittingness and propriety of active involvement even when it was not recognized by most of my peers. A group of close friends, first locally, then across the state, cemented the tie and made me feel that this particular institution was an extremely valuable and necessary part of life, even despite visible signs of its decline, e.g., few young members in sponsoring lodges, the relative inactivity of my male relatives in bodies with which they gladly were affiliated, and an intellectual awareness of the numerical decline of the Fraternity dating from about 1962 when I was 14/15.

II. Cynicism/Rejection. Upon graduation from college in 1969 at age 22, I came to realize that what I had understood to be genuine and concrete value was largely illusory. While I had been aware of the conflict between Masonic ideals and practices, both in terms of the institution's politics and in the practice of individual Freemasons toward themselves and non-Masons, this took on the full force of experience. In what I now see as a last ditch effort to "save the appearances" and to shore up a waning idealism, I became a member of The Philalethes Society and corresponded with Dwight L. Smith about the nature and purpose of the Fraternity. I received from him at that time what is now a treasured possession — a copy of "Why This Confusion in the Temple?" inscribed, "To William H. Stemper, Jr., co-worker in the pursuit of excellence. Dwight L. Smith, August 19, 1969." Then, as now, Dwight Smith's writings spoke to the young Mason with a critical awareness and an affirmation of the fundamentals of the Craft which are lasting in the face of institutional decline.

Nonetheless, while still a member on the rolls, I rejected active Masonic membership and became active, as a graduate student, in the movements characteristic of the concerns of the late sixties and early seventies. Eventually, I dropped Philalethes membership, not to take it up again for several years.

III. Realism/Appropriation. After completion of graduate study in 1974 at age 27, my process of a realistic reappropriation of Freemasonry began. For five years, while still a dues-payer in lodge, Shrine and Scottish Rite, and while thinking from time to time about the Fraternity, I was thoroughly inactive. My recollection of the beginning of this process was while walking home from work one day and thinking that it would be good to visit a lodge. Shortly thereafter, I wrote the Grand Secretary of New York, R.W. Wendell K. Walker, who had the then Senior Warden, George R. Hill, invite me to attend and later to affiliate with his lodge, Independent Royal Arch No. 2, F&AM, founded ca. 1760. Over a period of time, I became an active sideliners and was asked by the Master to head a study group designed to suggest reform which would make the lodge more appealing to younger members. The process continued for a year, the report proposed, and soundly rejected by the older establishment within the lodge.

Nevertheless, the experience of serious and sustained thinking about the nature of Freemasonry and its place in an urban environment, i.e., New York City, made me reconsider Freemasonry as a possible fraternal community of merit and usefulness in ways I had not considered as a teenager or as a graduate student in my early twenties.

The positive, concrete achievement of this period was the germination of an idea which has, so far, led to considerable activity and creativity in and around the Fraternity in New York and which has begun to have an impact on other levels of Masonic involvement — the concept of The Goose and Gridiron.

As part of the lodge planning process mentioned before, I devoted the summer of 1975 to the organization of a lodge-sponsored Chevalier Degree observance. With the assistance of State DeMolay headquarters in New York, I obtained a list of those who had received the Degree and who now lived in New York. All were written and of those who responded were two, John Mauk Hilliard and Dennis Nelson Zier, who became leaders in Independent Royal Arch Lodge, Hilliard serving as Master in 1979. A nucleus developed from this initial event which, in time, evolved into The Goose and Gridiron Club of New York, an effort to bring younger and younger-thinking Masons and non-Masons together in a convivial social surrounding replicating the ethos and environment from which speculative Freemasonry grew in the early 18th Century. My instigation of this process signaled the reappropriation of Freemasonry as an important element in my own life, both as a community of friends and a system of ideas.

This process has continued ever since. As the years go on, I have come to sense both the promise and limitations of the Masonic institution as a primary community in an urban setting and, more deeply, its intrinsic value as a source of vision for new realities in the future. This process has led me to change lodge affiliation, seeking more supportive fraternal relationships and a clearer sense of the genuine elements of Masonic teaching that are both practical and realistic as well as spiritually nurturing. The truthfulness of Masonic symbolism, especially of the darker side of life, e.g., the ruffian, the rough ashlar, darkness, caution, etc., have taken on existential and direct meaning as a result of experiences inside of lodges walls and without. And still the incredible persistence of the Masonic vision of "the brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God," articulated philosophically, symbolically, historically and institutionally so as to make an ideal a more practical possibility (albeit in faltering and limited ways), has increasingly become a personal resolve and commitment.

In each of these three stages of my own Masonic growth and development, I have been aware that our methods for understanding the meaning of Masonic history are too limited to allow most men to grasp the richness of Freemasonry as actual, empirical history **and** as a way of life that leads to mature growth and self-development. The tendency has been toward preoccupation with antiquarianism, to a love of lore, legend



and history for their own sake if one is, in fact, intellectually interested in the Craft at all. On the other side, the tendency has been to utilize the Craft as an **escape** (not a **retreat**, a valid and highly appropriate usage) from the world or as a vent for frustrations in work or human relationships in the world. Our present methods of historical thinking about the Craft have frequently reinforced both tendencies, neither of which make the Craft visible as an important and successful moral option in life.

In specific terms, one might say that the world of Mackey and Pike was too credulous for us to believe in the late 20th Century, even though it is incredibly rich. Similarly, one might accuse Gould and Hughan of driving the sensate spirit out of Masonic history in an understandable campaign to find out what **really** happened as a path to scholarly respectability and objective truth. Yet, in neither case has the liveliness of the history suggested the full range and possibility of human experience which produced Freemasonry in the first place. Rather, it has made the thinking Freemason a pursuer of the occult and arcane, at worst, in the first place and a dry commentator on texts or an antiquarian in the second. If we understand the role of history as the background for self-understanding and as a landscape from which moral purpose is derived, as it has been in Judaism and Christianity (both the Passover Seder and the Christian Mass are recitations of **holy history, hellsgesichte**), then there is no wonder that the Fraternity appears to lack inner vitality and outward growth. The lack of a timely method for Masonic historical thinking and writing is, in large measure, the reason the Fraternity is in decline. People live their history and when their history is not alive, they do not live in any genuine and self-fulfilling sense.

The path to a new Masonic method in historical thinking is to fully understand that a certain spirit created the Fraternity in the first place, regardless of when or where this happened exactly. This spirit led the writers of both schools to describe what they saw and what they felt, with the tools available to them at their time and in their places; and as human beings, no doubt, they were guided, too, by certain forms of self-interest which resulted in Pike's revival of the Scottish Rite in the South and in Gould's foundation of **Quatuor Coronati** — two institutions which have decisively affected the nature of Freemasonry in the 20th Century but which have not brought the Craft to a deeper existential sense of its own possibility.

The path to this spirit is not through previous institutional paths of Pike or Gould. Rather, it is through the individual's careful consideration of his own experience of Freemasonry at both the objective and feeling levels, the examination of his own experience in light of the history of the whole Fraternity in the broadest sense, and in light of the ritual and symbolism around him. Through such a process of writing, scholarship and reflection, the promise of Freemasonry can unfold for the next epoch of its development to its members and to the world. Today, it is clear a new spirit is needed.

# LOST LEADERS

By William Stemper

It's difficult to look at the Fraternity without concern for its health and vitality. The Craft is undergoing a shift in character which will shape its future and affect its survival.

The main aspect of this change is loss of membership and with it the vitality associated with a growing, health and stimulating organization. In 1978, forty-six Grand Lodges lost (net) 59,447 members. Only four Grand Lodges showed net gains. The total net loss for the Fraternity was 58,403. This leaves a total of 3,360,409 members in the 49 American Grand Lodges. The principal reason for the losses is mounting deaths and fewer initiations. The gains (North Carolina, South Carolina, Arizona and Florida) either reflect shifts in Masonic affiliations or are from Grand Lodges that do not reflect the nation as a whole. This should give leaders of the Craft cause for concern.

Losses are not the issue. The health of the Fraternity has never been members but the relationship of the Mason to his Lodge. As Dwight L. Smith has said for years, this is best indexed by the numbers of new lodges being formed, not the gains or losses of individual Grand Lodges.

The fact is the Craft is neither healthy by the standard of its overall membership, nor by the standard of lodge life. Few new lodges are formed each year. Far more consolidate or merge.

The fundamental reason the Fraternity is in such a state is that Masons are not communicating the teachings, traditions and principles of the Craft to the world outside the lodge. Most lodges are not making an effort at educating their members to fundamental Masonic teachings. Beyond ritual, little is done to educate the candidate about the institution. Masonic research is carried on outside of the general Masonic population in research lodges, clubs, societies and committees far removed from the attention of the ordinary Freemason. Grand Lodges are preoccupied with their own affairs and more and more with the costs of maintaining and perpetuating Masonic homes, hospitals and charities. There is little evidence on the part of the official Masonic leadership in the United States that the Craft's leadership is aware of the state of the Fraternity. Certainly it is not prepared to discuss ways to stop the decline. Such suggestions as are made, allowing solicitation for example, involve no diagnosis of the nature of the problem.

There is a monumental irony in that the Fraternity appears to be in such precarious health **today**. At no time in its recent history has there been more interest in Freemasonry by scholars outside of the Craft. This has been evidenced by eminent historians (Cf. Francis A. Yates, whose several works on Renaissance history give Freemasonry provocative and stimulating mention; and John M. Roberts, *The Mythology of Secret Societies*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972) concerned with early modern and



modern study of social history and the history of ideas. There appears to be such a renaissance of interest in Freemasonry among non-Masonic scholars that one can scarcely examine the index of a recent work on European, and frequently American, history dealing with the 17th-20th centuries without mention of the relationship of Freemasonry to religion, politics or society.

At not time in recent American history has there been a more pronounced susceptibility on the part of American youth to the kinds of ideals, brotherhood and universal harmony and justice Freemasonry has espoused for centuries. It is as if there is no connection between our teachings, work and tradition and the world.

Such a climate requires careful action on the part of the leaders. Every effort to examine the nature of the decline and the possibility for survival should be made at every level of Masonic authority without delay.

What form should this effort assume? In the briefest terms, it must take two courses, one at the national level, the other at the local. Both are related. Each has a contribution to make to the solution of what appears to be the gravest crisis Freemasonry has faced in the United States since the period of the Morgan episode.

First, at the local level, the form for Masonic renewal is simple. No Master, or other presiding officer, should be elected or installed without a planned and well-executed effort to revive the "ancient" custom of Masonic and social discourse around the "festive board." It is not enough to carry on "Masonic education" via magazine subscription, books, pamphlets, etc. Masonic education must be the essence and core of a lodge's life. It should be an indispensable element of each regular Masonic communication.

The framework for such a process is the "table lodge," if authorized, or a dinner setting at which informed and brief addresses on the history and tradition of the Craft are presented. There is ample resource for doing this. Many books are available which describe these settings and how to use them.

There is no way for establishing Masonic education as a priority in lodges without making it a reason for honors and advancement. Realistically speaking, **most** Freemasons, as human if extraordinary men of character, pursue Masonic office, as awards accrue, on the basis of what values the organization sets at the practical level beyond or below the level of surface ideal. In the United States, Masonic honors tend to follow from ritualistic proficiency and support of Grand Lodge activities, especially Masonic homes, at the lodge level, and from membership recruitment and support of philanthropies at the concordant or appendant bodies' level. If a systematic effort were made to promote Masonic education programs at the local level, with recognition and honors, the results would be dramatic. Freemasons would soon learn their own best interests are served from knowing more about the Craft and from teaching others. The rewards in personal fulfillment and self-development for the

individual Freemason would be significant.

At the national level, the necessary form for Masonic renewal is closer cooperation and communication among and between Grand Lodges and the various appendant, allied and concordant bodies. Because each state is sovereign and Grand Masters tend to change every one or two years, absolute consensus among the various states' leaders is almost impossible. Each Grand Lodge is jealous of its prerogatives; and the richness of the American Masonic legacy stems in large measure from its diversity and independence.

This fact should in no way deter serious leaders of Masonic organizations, and especially the Masonic intellectual and journalistic communities, from adopting a sound and practical strategy for renewal. The clearest means toward this is the formation of a centralized institute or research center designed to stimulate ideas about the nature of social and fraternal organisms. Such a center could be a clearinghouse for current research and writing on the nature of voluntary societies, shifts and changes in modern lifestyle, and how it will affect the Fraternity and its future. It should not be controlled by any one body but serve all equally, whether or not such bodies contribute to its support.

Such an institute should avoid any particular viewpoint. It should be a Forum for the exchange of ideas. It should draw on the best social research available in the nation regardless of the researcher's Masonic affiliation. Its findings should be disseminated to all interested in the future of voluntary fraternal societies and to the quality of American life in general. Such a center would best be financed from the contributions of individuals within the Fraternity who are interested in its future — and solicitations to that effect might be jointly sponsored by the whole range of Masonic and related memberships.

Out of such an environment creativity could result. One project might be a plan of coordinated efforts to establish lodges designed to appeal to the younger professional man. Another might be a re-thinking of the Fraternity's strategy of youth organization support; how existing Masonic sponsored organizations can strengthen the Fraternity's appeal to young people. Still another might be the linkage of lodge life to programs of continuing adult education and career development to keep pace with shifting social and economic developments.

One can hardly think or write about such matters without the sense of responsibility Masonic membership confers upon the individual man. Freemasonry is a deep and rich tradition from every viewpoint — ethical, social, cultural, psychological, spiritual and beyond. It was never intended to be anything save a way of life — the intent pursuit of light and understanding in a frequently dark and worrisome world. If for no other reason, each Freemason, especially those who wear the purple of the Fraternity, should work full-time in their fraternal endeavors to preserve and hand on this "goodly heritage" to the ensuing generation with more brilliance and clarity than that with which they themselves received it.



# THE FUTURE VITALITY

*By William Stemper*

Few issues have occupied the thinking of Masonic leaders recently more than that of membership. There is mounting conversation and debate over what appears to be impending losses of severe proportions in almost every Jurisdiction in the United States and Canada. Those within the formal structure of the American Craft and those among the general membership are aware of the trend. We have fewer initiations, fewer new Lodges, a higher median age, less prominence in local communities, and a much reduced capacity to attract the energies, loyalties and commitment of younger educated and professional men.

Vocal concern about membership has tended to focus upon two issues: increased program activity, including emphasis on Masonic education, and the question of solicitation or non-solicitation. Other questions such as memorization requirements for new members and the tendency of Lodges to be only concerned with the conferral of degrees and internal administration have also been raised, but the tendency has been toward "reforms" that can be legislated by Grand Lodge regulation and away from ideas that would require Lodges to substantially change their internal operations and procedures.

A recent report of the Committee on Masonic Education and Program Development of the Supreme Council 33°, A.A.S.R., N.M.J., meeting in Chicago in September 1979 is a case in point. The Supreme Council, concerned about a decline in the pool of Master Masons from which Scottish Rite membership is drawn, has demonstrated a most helpful interest in improving the educational level of Master Masons as a whole **about Freemasonry**. The committee has reasoned that much can be gained from increased dissemination of good Masonic reading designed for the non-specialist. It also has called for leadership seminars conducted **by the Scottish Rite for Grand Lodges** in order to train Lodge officers in leadership and program skills.

The Supreme Council's move is a highly commendable and progressive venture on behalf of the whole Fraternity within its jurisdiction and represents one of the first significant efforts for Masons of every degree and grade to cooperate in responding to the challenge of membership decline. One can justly hope that Lodge and Grand Lodge leaders will accept this kind of help and cooperation in the time ahead.

Another element of the general issue of membership decline has not received as much consideration, however. This is the question of **whom** does the Fraternity wish to attract to the Craft and how might this be done. In other words, the trend has been toward concern with the problem of membership development within the Fraternity as opposed to asking the question, "What is going on today in the life of the younger American

male and what might reasonably attract him to a Masonic commitment?"

This question is a very important one for Masonic leaders to ask because it can successfully shape both the kinds of programs which are developed by organizations concerned about decline and how these are actually translated into activities. Programs which may appeal to a man sixty years of age within the Fraternity may not, in other words, appeal to the young man of thirty outside the Fraternity.

To make this observation — that we should be aware of what might attract the young man to Freemasonry — is to say nothing new. Twice in the present century the Masonic Fraternity has attracted large numbers of young men to its Lodges: after World War I (1919-1929), after World War II and, to a lesser extent, after Korea (1949-1959). In both periods, Masonic ranks swelled. At this time, there was **something** in Freemasonry which appealed to the young man launching a career and establishing a family. Today, this appears not to be so. Why?

The young man today is a creature of conflict. For a variety of reasons, this person in his twenties or thirties tends to seek two objectives at the same time: (a) career success and financial security with (b) personal growth and meaning.

These two tugs, in a host of different ways, have always been at the hearts of humans, but since the 1960's, when cultural change revealed to countless youth the possibility that both of these disparate elements might be brought together in one healthy, whole and fulfilled life, this **intimaton** has become an **expectation**.

Few men or women will make a commitment to any cause, society or institution that does not make it more possible for them to live a dynamic and fulfilled human existence. It is their perception that Freemasonry, while heir to important ideals of brotherhood, charity and a God-centered universe, has not brought these ideals into practice. Further, it is a common perception that while the Craft teaches moral improvement through allegory and symbolism, it is no longer allied with the dynamic elements of human existence which can lead to a growthsome and productive life. Young men who are attracted to active membership in the Craft do not reflect the main current of young adult life in the country or have developed distinct historical and cultural interests which make Freemasonry appealing.

In a few years the lack of appeal of Freemasonry to a whole generation of young men will become evident in a dramatic way. American Jurisdictions will experience massive losses in membership and numerous Lodges will consolidate or merge. The generations that joined the Fraternity after the two World Wars will fall away due to natural aging processes and fewer men will take their places.

At such a time, the Craft should have in mind a considered and thoughtful plan to insure its future vitality, an approach that is both loyal to the richness of Masonic heritage and landmark and understanding of the nature of the young man whom it wants to attract. "Curealls," such as efforts to "modernize" the structure of Freemasonry, permitting



solicitation, and making the Fraternity more of a "family" or social institution, will not insure results. They may, in fact, so alter the nature of the Craft that certain basic insights and fundamentals which make Freemasonry unique may be forgotten or lost. This would be especially true if the ritual (excepting certain lectures) were changed in any significant structural way. Freemasonry has within it the seeds of its own survival and growth and the basic nature of the institution should in no way be changed.

What should and must be changed, however, is the manner in which the Masonic idea is conveyed to those within and outside of its Lodge walls. **Means** must be found to exemplify and embody Masonic teaching in authentic human experience in ways that the Fraternity becomes, once again, an existential way of life for its members and is perceived as such by those who are not members.

Such a task is, in essence, simple. The **environment** of the Lodge should be made conducive to a greater degree of social, cultural and intellectual stimulation both in and outside of tiled meetings. The atmosphere of a Masonic Lodge should be and become a relaxed, cultural situation in which men may meet and get to know one another outside of commercial and competitive circumstances. Opportunities for informed conversation on the history and purpose of Freemasonry and discussion of topics related to Freemasonry as a way of life should be attempted in a deliberate and intentional way. The role of brotherhood in an urban civilization, the meaning of work as a "craft," the role of Freemasonry as a civilizing influence in society, and others would be appropriate topics.

Such a reappropriation of Masonic ethos, or environment, would mean that Lodges should not only avoid meetings in which the primary activity is **only** rote repetition, ordinary business, and the conferral of degrees, it also means that this essential fraternal civility should be carried into the neighboring club, restaurant, coffee house or inn (where modern Freemasonry began, e.g., the Goose and Gridiron, St. Paul's Churchyard, 1717). Non-members should be encouraged to join such gatherings and be a part of the social and conversational intercourse, making such events community events open to men of mannered, kindly and inquisitive spirit. Formal education and prominent social standing, while important as a sign or symbol of the Craft's essential historic nobility, should by no means become a requirement. Rather, gentleness and civility should remain, as they always have been with Freemasonry at its best, the mark of those invited and attending.

In such circumstances, younger men could come to an experience in a practical and existential way the genuine appeal of Fraternity. They could come to see that a life spent in sole pursuit of economic gain is, at its end, sterile. They could come to see that men have much to share with and offer one another at subtle and intangible levels. They could come to see that there is a particular "light" which emerges in a group or community of friends and brothers who quietly go about the business of nurturing and caring for one another and for those whom their friends

and brothers love.

In the briefest terms, the future of Freemasonry and its promise to the younger adult male is understanding that the history and ritual of the Fraternity is not an end in itself. We have too long viewed the ceremonial, landmarks and customs of the Craft as objects in themselves. They are, rather, means toward the creation and preservation of the highest form of morality and fraternity among men of good character.

In a more important sense, however, the quest of the young man today for integration of career success with personal development and meaning is at the very heart of the Masonic idea. The Craft was conceived at the beginning of the Speculative period (ca. 1646-1738) as a way to preserve the moral meaning of labor (the Operative stonemason's art) with a profound quest for God.

In the progress of time, both our understanding of work has changed and, in important ways, our concept of the presence of God in the universe. What has not changed, however, is the Masonic method of uniting men of quality in the pursuit of both. It is this treasure which modern Freemasons have to offer young men and if we will let it happen in pragmatic, pleasant and constructive ways, the Fraternity will come alive in ways we scarcely now imagine.



# FREEMASONRY AND "AGE"

*By William Stemper*

American Freemasonry has reached a point in its development as a fraternal society and as a system of moral ideas when the leadership needs to assess its prospects for future vitality and survival. The Craft has sustained substantial and simultaneous declines in membership, active participation, intellectual discourse and in organizational development. Like many other voluntary associations, Freemasonry in the United States is less able to command the energies and commitments of American men; most notably it has failed to appeal to younger professional men now moving into positions of prominence and leadership in the various phases of American public life. It is increasingly less possible to "explain away" the Masonic decline in the 70's, evidenced by membership losses, accompanied by a rising median age among Masons and the fact that the place of the Masonic Lodge in the average community's social environment has become considerably less important than it tended to be a half-century ago.

A side effect of the problem is to be seen in an equally disturbing yet little noticed development. In brief, there is almost no serious reflection being undertaken in the Masonic press about the reasons for the decline, or what programming or planning might be attempted to restore vitality to American Freemasonry. The reality of the problem is not being publicly discussed among Masons. The level of intellectual discourse on the problem of Masonic decline today is very low and creative reflection is almost absent.

The purpose of this short essay is to point to one aspect of the situation in order to stimulate thought and, possibly, to remedy the silence which pervades the Craft on the subject of Masonic decline.

First, it is important to say that age as a **motif** characterizes Freemasonry more than it does any other great fraternal organization. Not only is our ritual characterized by Biblical, Medieval and Enlightenment ideas — qualities of unsurpassed richness and ancient heritage — but the organized Craft with which we are familiar has passed its 262nd birthday (the Grand Lodge of England, est. 1717) as an institution.

Yet, not only is Freemasonry old, Masons are as well. The average age of our members is much higher than it has ever been, at least in recent history, and proportionately fewer young men are taking the place of our brethren who die. Age, in terms of Masonic tradition, is an unsurpassable virtue, especially when one contemplates that the type of moral lessons Freemasonry teaches are most effectively conveyed because they have withstood the tests of time. But when age becomes the chief characteristic of membership composition, it signifies a lack of encounter **within the institution** between the world of a past, rich heritage to the

world of the present day. In short, one way to view the increasing age of Masons today is that the institution of Freemasonry itself is no longer communicating its time-honored principles to the world around it.

There is danger for Masonic thinking on this subject which should be openly recognized and avoided. It is the tendency to become uncommunicative and defensive without exploring the substance of the issue. Our culture has not dealt justly or equitably with the aged, excluding them to a large extent from the mainstream of the professions and public affairs and, as a result, fraternal societies, popular among the young in the early part of this century, have become shelters for the aged. Many fraternal societies, including Freemasonry and its appendant bodies, have become a functional means of social survival, providing the sort of securities and rewards to the elderly that tend not to be available to them in the general culture.

The result has been a general reluctance to raise the issue or, once it is mentioned, to blame Masonic decline more on "modern trends" and the real or imagined irresponsibilities of a younger generation. This is a form of defensiveness which neatly excuses the leadership of the Craft from responding to the situation in critical and constructive ways. The real question — how age and youth might be combined to create renewed vitality within the Fraternity — is functionally ignored.

A second point to make, apart from the fact that age characterizes the Craft in a unique way, is that American Freemasonry has also developed a distinctive attitude towards youth. The Fraternity has committed significant resources to the support of Masonic-sponsored youth organizations but it has not been able to attract and hold the interest of young professionally or intellectually inclined men. The evidence for such an observation is severalfold. First, it is apparent to the leaders of many grand lodges that senior members of the Order of DeMolay do not make the transition into lodge activity in great numbers. The social, educational and professional demands on a young man's time rarely allow the commitment of time and energy that the ordinary Masonic lodge requires of its active members. Few lodges, too, conduct activities that stimulate the thinking of younger men.

Further, there is a point of diminishing return with regard to Freemasonry's **capacity** to attract youth and youthful ideas and energies. This, in return, shapes the attitudes and consciousness of the Fraternity towards the young. The phenomenon is that the older the median age of the membership, the less able Masons will be to attract younger members and the present trends will persist. A number of fraternal societies akin to Freemasonry in philosophy or similarity of ideals, the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, for example, have probably reached the point of no return. They have become so superannuated that they will never attract the "new blood" they would need to recover vitality.

Why have we been unable to attract the young and hold their interest? The answer, in part, is related to a sociological trend called "the decline



of the voluntary sector." Society no longer **depends** upon the functions that fraternal societies once provided, e.g. relief in distress. Most lodges, having been organized when the small town or neighborhood was a chief constituency, are not able to cope with a world wherein the constituency is the "region," "nation" or even the globe itself.

But sociology is only part of the problem. The fundamental difficulty is the inability of the Craft to assimilate young men and young ideas into lodge life. In brief, we have not taken the young Mason into the lodge and used him for what he is most interested in. We have insisted that he assume our own color and character and that he memorize innumerable lectures and rituals before we allow him to assume responsibility for the life and future of the lodge.

In most lodges, where ritual is the chief function of the lodge's activity, a young man who might be interested in the experience of Masonic fraternity, the history, philosophy or culture of the Masonic tradition, or even personal development, is afforded no place of significance unless he is willing to devote long hours to rote memorization. To use one metaphor, insisted that everyone in our "congregation" be a "clergyman."

The problem of failure to utilize the talents and self-interests of younger men is a sign of our attitude toward the young: We do not want them if they are not prepared to be like us. An excellent example of this attitude is to be found in one of the most outmoded idiosyncrasies of American Freemasonry, racial discrimination. It is very difficult to convince a college-educated man of the 60's or 70's that we, as an organization, are serious about the "brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God" when the Fraternity is locked into a posture of racial segregation. It is an embarrassment that fewer young men are willing to assume.

Attitude toward age is but one issue that needs deep exploration by the intellectual and political leadership of the American Craft. It is an especially important issue because it governs our attitude toward those who will carry our Fraternity's traditions into the 21st Century if it is to survive. We shall have to divert at least a portion of our energies to such questions if we are to be judged by posterity to have loved both the spirit of our ancient Fraternity and the tradition by which it has been conveyed to us.

# THE YORK RITE CENTER

*By William Stemper*

The mission of the York Rite of Freemasonry is to preserve and strengthen the Masonic Fraternity in all of its aspects. It is to complement, advance and support the principles of the Craft in order that the brotherhood of man and the Fatherhood of God might more nearly become realities in the communities and in the world in which the human family lives. It recognizes that the fundamental emerging reality is a world in which the human family lives. It recognizes that the fundamental emerging reality is a world in which there will be an increasing sense of planetary awareness that all men and women are part of an indissoluble whole and that cooperation is necessary in order that this human family might learn to live and work together.

The symbolism and philosophy of the York Rite is particularly suited to this mission. The imagery of the Rite is the founding of the word which had been lost, its preservation in the Crypt, and its final and decisive interpretation in the name, person and figure of Christ. To the Christian Freemason, the York Rite is the consummation of the quest for the Light in a manner that preserves the integrity of Ancient Craft Freemasonry and which draws from him an ethical commitment to preserve the Christian Faith. To the Jew, the Chapter and Council are dramatic fulfillment of the quest of the people of Israel for the ineffable Name of God and a fulfillment of the Covenant. Within the Rite, both Christian and Jew find unique commitment, within one fraternal bond, to a common quest for light, life and spiritual meaning.

Nowhere is this unique mission more appropriate than to the young men of North America. The York Rite, because of its character, history and its special relationship to the whole Craft, is particularly suited to attracting the energies and imagination of men who seek both the security of sound community involvement and personal success but who also seek value in meaning in their own lives beyond the material. The Rite could provide the linkage, in a community of mutual friendship and support, which could anchor the young man in the richness of biblical and western history while at the same time involving him in a community of friends and brothers.

The achievement of such a mission depends upon the vision and imagination of York Rite leadership and the deployment of York Rite resources to meet the vision. I would suggest that the best way to such an achievement, an event which would signal a revitalization of the whole of the Masonic Fraternity, would be the establishment of eight regional York Rite Centers in the United States and the utilization of these centers for the spreading of the mission to surrounding areas. These centers would be located in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Boston, St. Louis,



San Francisco, Atlanta and Denver. Additional centers might be located, as desirable and needed, in Washington, D.C., Houston, Orlando, Kansas City, New Orleans and Seattle.

The purpose and function of the Center would be to (1) coordinate York Rite Activity in the region surrounding it; (2) to establish other, smaller centers; and (3) to conduct, nurture and establish cooperative and fraternal ties among the leaders of the grand chapters, councils and commanderies within the region. The location of the Center would reflect the metropolitan population distribution of the region (rather than state boundaries, the province of grand jurisdictions) and would also reflect the cultural motif and tone of the culture within the region (New England, Mid-West, Metropolitan New York, "L.A.", Bay Area, Mountain, "New" South).

The activities of the Centers would be three-fold: (1) coordination of membership recruitment and the nurture of the membership; (2) the orientation of new members by studies (lectures, films, discussion groups on the history, philosophy and purpose of Freemasonry, schools of instruction in the history behind the ritual), adult education, career resources, some counseling resources, "Masonic education" in the broadest sense — the personal development and education of Freemasons; and (3) the Conferral of the Work by (a) occasional regional classes; (b) local degree nights; and (c) schools of instruction in the performance of ritual and the variety of theatrical and dramatic elements that might enhance its effect.

Of these three elements, the key is **membership**. No quality of excellence of ritual and education will substitute for lack of members. It must be admitted that while Freemasonry's survival does not depend on large numbers of members, the present membership decline is unprecedented (**relative** economic stability and absence of persecution, cf., the Depression, 1929, and the Morgan Period, 1830).

It is in the area of membership that the York Rite Center shows the greatest promise for Freemasonry. It has the capacity to plan, organize and execute activities designed to attract the young business and professional man (and his family) to the Fraternity. How might this be done?

The York Rite Center would draw upon all Masonic resources for this process. The essential plan would entail the recruitment of Masons, generally **not** active in their lodges but still members in good standing, to become members of the Rite if not already so. These men would reflect the business, professional and institutional leadership of the region. Some could be recruited to serve on advisory boards, contributing capital or assisting to raise it for the purposes of the Center. In some instances, a foundation to advance the purposes of the Center would be appropriate. These men would be evaluated in terms of their comparative standing in their communities or professional establishment and in terms of their willingness to assist the Center. Each would be requested to bring his own talent to the project and would not be required to do

ritual or another responsibility of a particular Chapter, Council or Commandery as a prerequisite to becoming involved. The men would be selected for their general and overall competency and not their standing in the official organization of the Craft. Every effort should be made to choose at least one or two men from each major profession and industry in the town or city.

With this process complete, each man would be asked to nominate five or more prospective candidates for the Craft. They would not be asked to solicit them for membership in their lodge. They would, rather, only be asked to (1) nominate the younger man (21-40), giving some indication of the young man's qualities, achievements, promise, etc., and (2) participate in the Center's membership process.

Having a list of 100-200 prospective men in a given metropolitan area or a relatively smaller number in a smaller community, a series of social events, receptions with cocktails **available**, wine, cheese, etc., should be set up — approximately 4 to 6 per year. These should be regularly established as an on-going project of the Center.

At each reception, held in pleasant surroundings at a hotel, restaurant or other attractive place (few Masonic Temples have facilities for such receptions), a club-like atmosphere should be constructed. The timing and events of the evening should appear something like this:

5:00 Arrival and simple registration, sign a list of invitees and get a **name-tag**. Drinks should be available.

5:30-5:45 Call to order and simple introductions around the room (if he number permits), giving name, occupation, etc.

6:00 A simple address by one of the professional/business men recruited on his view of the dilemmas and opportunities of our time, with slight reference to the Craft but with **no** reference to ritual, in-house language or to the particular activities of a given lodge, etc.

6:15-7:00 Reception continues and ends with an opportunity for participants to go to dinner following.

After several of these events, a committee of local leaders would draw a list of prospective men who would be asked to another event, at which a more direct representation of Freemasonry and its purposes and ideals would be made. No solicitation would be allowed but ample discussion of the requirements for Masonic membership, time, etc., would be discussed along with the financial commitment. In such a way, candidates would be introduced to key lodges.

**At this point**, the young man would be introduced to the activities of the York Rite Center. He would be invited to a series of discussions, dinner parties, cocktail gatherings, etc., by one or two persons assigned to him for this purpose. He would be assigned a mentor, in his profession or a related profession, who would take an interest in him and see that contact was **not** lost in the process of receiving the degrees. His line of continuity throughout the entire process of becoming a Freemason would



be his tie with the York Rite Center. Under no circumstances should the Center interfere with the lodge's work nor, **however**, should the young man be left to experience the lodge initiation process without support from the Center. He should perceive a deeper and broader community outside of his lodge but, at the same time, come to see the lodge as the building block for future personal and fraternal experience.

In this sense, it should be remembered that the primary problem of the young man in Masonry is that he fails to assimilate into the community of the lodge because (1) most members are much older than he; (2) most men in the lodge do not reflect his peer group or sophistication; and (3) most lodges are reluctant to use the young man for what he might do best for himself and for the Fraternity unless he is willing to learn much ritual. He will functionally perceive that the lodge is not interested in him unless he is willing to become like the other members of the lodge — older, set in their ways and unwilling to change.

The York Rite Center would, on the other hand, put him in touch with the men who would continually assure him of the depth and richness of the Craft, including the ritual, but also expose him to stimulating events and people in his profession outside of the lodge. The York Rite Center would be constructed with this function in mind in the membership area.

The structure of the York Rite Center in a given regional city would include a steering committee of representatives taken (a) from the elective leadership of the Craft — Masters, High Priests, Illustrious Masters, Eminent Commanders — and (b) from the leadership of the community who are Freemasons. The balance should be even. One group should not dominate the other. The steering committee's function would be to coordinate the work of the bodies associated with the Center in terms of Masonic activities and in terms of the life of the community as a whole. The committee's work would be to oversee the whole work of the Center and to establish the Center as a training ground for Masonic leaders and a path for career and personal development in the virtues associated with the tradition of Freemasonry. In this sense, the committee could develop the founding of new lodges reflecting younger interests and schedule activities of use to the whole Fraternity.

Beyond the steering committee, the Center would be structured as three, or more, coordinate York Rite bodies with a centralized administration. Some form of the South Carolina Plan should be used such that each body meets with the other with each taking turns opening and closing on successive months. A salaried executive secretary or administrative director should oversee the Center via his coordinate role as secretary of all three bodies. He should have clerical support and, in general, assume the role of promoter of the Rite and executive administrator in much the same way a city manager administers a city under the direction of mayor and council.

Within this structure, each coordinate body(ies) should have a designated role or function. No body should replicate the other's essential function

but each should complement the whole. The functions should essentially reflect the following principle: Chapter — Ritual; Council — Membership; Commandery — Education.

Because of its premier role as the first body of York Rite Freemasonry, i.e., the completion of Ancient Craft Masonry, it is appropriate that the Chapter assume responsibility for coordinating the conferral of all degrees. This means that the High Priest would be the coordinator of ritual for the whole Center and because all York Rite Masons are members of the Chapter (and not necessarily the Council and Commandery), the pool of talent would be largest.

The Council of the Cryptic Rite, "Royal and Select Masters," similarly, because of the economy of its ritual and the simplicity of its design, uncomplicated floor work and relatively few officers, would be especially conducive to membership. Every effort should be made to attract the best and most skilled men from the business and professional communities of the city to Council membership and activity.

The Commandery, because it is the apex of the Rite and because of its more "sovereign" and centralized authority, would be conducive to the cultural and education function of the Center. Activities having to do with career counseling, the arts, music, literature, and the continuing education of Masons in general should be coordinated by the Commandery.

In turn, the three international York Rite Bodies, in addition to supporting the York Rite Centers, would also serve the state and local bodies in the efficient execution of their function. The Chapter would be able to call on the General Grand Chapter for resources in the excellent performance of the ritual, professional theatrical advice, props, coaching, etc. The Council would be able to call on the General Grand Council for resources in membership development, contacts in other Centers and jurisdiction, and general strategy on attracting the young man. The Commandery would be able to call on the Grand Encampment for materials relative to the history of the Fraternity, associations with research lodges at home and abroad, The Philalethes Society, academic and cultural resources, access to universities, arranging regional performances of **The Magic Flute**, etc.

Further, the international bodies might develop the resources and skills to serve their subordinate and constituent bodies in these ways, deploying and specializing their own resources to work in these areas and avoiding the duplication of services and administrative costs.

National coordination of York Rite Centers would be vested in a steering committee comprised of representatives from the Council, Chapter and Commandery at the international level, and designated young men who reflect the principles and appeal of the system. This national steering group should meet regularly to review the development of the system, to evaluate its functioning and to do all possible to make it work. A staff should be retained to handle the administrative work of the Centers and a national executive director should be retained to implement the principles and plan of the York Rite Centers.



With these elements in place, a set of nationally deployed, regionally-based Centers dedicated to the survival and growth of Freemasonry could be established and the York Rite mission achieved.

# THE TEMPLAR LEGENDS

*By William Stemper*

The Templar legends, particularly those of the trial and martyrdom of Jacques DeMolay, have long been of compelling interest to the Freemason and the non-Mason. Like few other topics, they have captured the imagination of scholars and non-scholars alike. These stories are of particular and obvious interest to Freemasonry because of the special use to which they have been put in Masonic ceremonial, notably the so-called Rite of Strict Observance that influenced the modern Scottish Rite Degree of Knight Kadosh and the Order of the Temple conferred in a commandery of Knights Templar. Similarly, the Second Degree of the Order of DeMolay epitomizes Masonic thought on the subject and represents how especially the martyrdom of Jacques DeMolay has been established at the very center of Masonic imagination.

The task of any of us, Masons, Knights Templar, Scottish Rite members of the 30th Degree, if we may be termed conscientious or even seriously interested in the traditions of our Gentle Craft, is to examine two specific terms; namely, (1) what factually can we know about the dissolution of the Templars, and (2) what has been the **function** of the Templar legends throughout history from 1314 to the present?

Both of these questions are massive and there is vast literature about Templars, even vaster on Masonic appropriations of Templarism's history and lore. The dissolution rather than the actual work of the Templars during their existence seems to be the chief point of remembrance in Masonic lore and legend. What makes this topic manageable for our purposes, even necessary to explore despite its great dimensions, is the question of function or how, **In the tradition**, actual historical events have been utilized and appropriated for the purpose of teaching moral lessons. As I have said, the dissolution of the Templars, quintessentially the martyrdom of Jacques DeMolay, has captured our imagination in ways that no abstract philosophy or political-religious ideology could possibly do. At one level, of course, the answer to why this has happened is clear. Events remembered and celebrated, the Christian Holy Communion and the drama of the Third Degree, for example, tend to remain at the core of men's consciousness when ideas do not. Events are among the greatest teachers but there is always the danger that we may remember only part of these events rather than the whole event and thus be selective in the lessons we choose to learn. This risk of selective appropriation is what makes an inquiry into the function of Templar legends in Freemasonry's tradition useful and necessary.

With such an event in our collective imaginations, to a greater or lesser degree, we owe it to ourselves to comprehend what is fact and what is not and how these facts have been used in subsequent history,



Masonic and profane.

We will proceed with three fundamental questions in mind, each of which will form a section of this essay. **First**, what were the origins and nature of the Templars from their founding in 1118 until the suppression of the Order on March 22, 1313? For our purposes, we are able to select a few of the more significant facts about the Order's character in Palestine. **Second**, what was the nature of the Order after the fall of the Holy Land; that is, after the Order was forced out of Palestine in 1291 and was forced to move its center of operations to Europe? And **Third**, to what use has the Templar-DeMolay legend been put since the dissolution? How have we used the events thus described for our own purposes?

### THE CHARACTER OF THE ORDER OF KNIGHTS TEMPLAR IN THE HOLY LAND: 1118-1291

First, let us remember that the Order of the Temple, founded in 1118 by Hugh de Payens and confirmed along semi-monastic lines with a Cistercian rule at the Council of Troyes in 1128, was deeply influenced not only by the Christian ideal of Chivalry but also by the world in which it existed — the non-Christian East. This is not difficult to grasp if we remember that the Templar's semi-monastic character and its military purpose in the Christian Crusades which were a major conduit of Eastern culture to the West in the High Middle Ages.

The fact is that a major influence on the development of the Templars were the Assassins, a secret society founded in Persia in the 11th Century. We know them popularly as users of **hashish**, a strong drug which fortified them to perform political assassinations under the absolute obedience to their ruler. We should recall that such acts then were far more conventional and indigenous to Eastern culture in medieval times than we view them today. Secrecy played a major role in Assassin organization and the preservation of their "secrets" motivated them to commit acts which in our eyes are clearly criminal. These secrets are now lost but three essential precepts were probably maintained as part of them: (it should be noted that these elements are similar to the elements of Templar confessions at the dissolution) 1. Heaven and hell are the same; 2. All actions are morally indifferent except those done out of loyalty to the Assassin order and its ruler; and 3. There being no conventional, accepted morality of right or wrong except within the order **obedience** to the Imam, the equivalent of a grand master, was the chief virtue. (See David Annan, "The Assassins and the Knights Templar," *Secret Societies*. New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967, p. 112).

Politically, the Assassins were a mix of elements, a sort of **kamikazi**, **Mafia** and religious order all in one. They set themselves against political and military entities outside themselves and, for example, sought to undermine the establishment of the Seljuk Empire (1055-1300), the chief organized political and military power in Asia Minor at that time.

Within the Islamic faith, they were, and their successors remain today, adherents of the Ismaili Sect, followers of the Aga Khan. In fairness to the Assassins, much maligned figures, it should be said of them that they merely systemized the widespread Muslim practice of political assassination, a Machiavellian practice which we westerners seem to have refined considerably since their time.

What was the Assassin influence on the Templars? Suffice it to say that it was seminal. Hugh de Payens adopted the assassin method of organization for the structure of the Order of the Temple as well as their colors, red and white, from the very beginning.

Similarly, the Templars attracted the same sort of person to their ranks as did the Assassins, the flotsam and jetsam of their social environment. The Templars were a type of "Foreign Legion" dedicated to the defense of the Holy Places and to the defense of the pilgrims who made their way to Jerusalem. They provided a permanent military structure, as did the Knights of Malta, which was reinforced at various times as new Crusades were organized. It should be noted, however, that the Templars from the beginning were a military Order like the Assassins. The Hospitalers, the Knights of Malta, were originally a nursing order that assumed military characteristics as the military situation worsened. When the Templars attempted to move their base of operations back to Europe at the end of the Crusading era, the Knights of Malta, perhaps wisely, chose not to do so but remained in the East serving as a buffer naval force against further Muslim advance.

The Templars also attracted great wealth to the Order as it was a custom in the Middle Ages to bequeath one's personal possessions to those institutions that might assure one's spiritual merit in the afterlife. This wealth and another Medieval custom, distinctive ceremonial and ritual, set them apart from other Christians and later set them up for the envy of powerful enemies and the disdain of advocates of spiritual reform within the Church.

The Knights Templar withdrew from Palestine in 1291 with the fall of Acre, in Syria, where they had been forced to go when Jerusalem fell to the Saracens in 1187, nearly a century before. They moved their military base to Cyprus but after this point, began to seek assimilation into Europe. The Templars had long maintained "temples" in major cities and in almost every state but it was a major innovation in Templar procedure to make the continent of Europe, rather than the Holy Land, the central base of operations. It is significant that the period of time from the fall of Acre to the dissolution of the Templars was a short one, less than twenty years.

The story of the Templars in the Holy Land is long and colorful, if not altogether illustrious, in its span of 173 years. It is too expansive to relate here and, in fact, is only indirectly related to the sequence of events after 1291. We frequently remember only the chivalry and romantic appeal of the Crusades, forgetting their more sordid aspects as well as the fact that it was the first major act of cultural and military



imperialism of the civilized Christian West.

It is sufficient here to mention that the history of the Templars in the Holy Land under their first three Grand Masters was quite stolid. Each of these men was an able military commander, administrator and diplomat in an environment which demanded each quality. The fourth, Bernard de Tremelai; the seventh, Philip de Milly; and the eighth, William of Tyre, all succumbed to political intrigue and infighting that was characteristic of the Crusader states after 1150. The most disastrous event in all Templar history, next the dissolution itself, waited upon the regime of the tenth Grand Master, Gerard de Ridfort, who actually betrayed the Templars and the Christian cause to the Saracens in ransom for his own life when defeated at the Battle of Lake Tiberias in 1187. The enmity of this transgression was enhanced because Templars were forbidden to barter for their lives when captured, except in exchange for the clothes and arms they carried with them.

The relevant fact to remember is that after Ridfort's perfidy in 1187, the Templars chose to accommodate themselves culturally as well as politically, at times, to Arabic civilization. They wore long beards, spoke Arabic and were quick to point out similarities between the Christian religion and Islam, notably references to the Virgin Mary in Koranic literature. It would be incorrect to see them as intellectual exponents of Arabic culture in the West (the Templars were soldiers, not scholars) but they did come to value esoteric doctrines and appreciated certain Muslim religious disciplines. In a contemporary idiom, there were *de facto* exponents of "detente" between East and West, especially when it suited their organizational objectives. The Templar stay in the Holy Land was not, in short, out of the purest religious motives that we incorrectly ascribe to the Crusades. They were astute politicians, financiers and aesthetic appreciators of a civilized culture which they came to know very well. This fact, particularly, was at a later time helpful to their enemies.

#### THE CHARACTER OF THE ORDER OF KNIGHTS TEMPLAR AFTER LEAVING PALESTINE: 1291-1314

It is said that King Philip IV of France, Phillippe le Bel, destroyed the Knights Templar because of his personal envy of their wealth. (Annan, p. 127). This is true in the sense that their wealth had made them the *de facto* bankers of Europe when usury was a venal sin and before the great banking families of Europe emerged, such as the Fuggers, yet the issue must be further refined if we are to understand that the moral lessons based the Templar's demise in Masonic and DeMolay ritual are rooted more deeply than the mere avariciousness of the King and the heroic moral exemplarism of the last Grand Master, Jacques DeMolay. History is rarely that neat. We are dealing here, instead, with social and political forces every bit as relevant to the traditions of the Fraternity as the lessons of individual and private morality involved.

First, it is important to remember that King Phillip was involved in the consolidation of the nation which has become France, against considerable regionalistic sentiment on the part of a feudal nobility. He was well aware that it was not possible for the power and authority of an international well-financed military order to coexist within the boundaries of his realm at such a time, especially when there were more French Templars than any other national grouping and when such an order could claim exemption from national obligations of defense and taxation on account of its papal charter (The Bull, *Omne Datum Optimum*, 1162). It was one thing for the order to have extensive land-holdings and wealth while its base of operations was foreign; it was quite another for it to claim exercise of its prerogatives in a situation of emergent nationalism. Phillip felt strongly that the Temple in France should be subject to his own royal French government.

A second important characteristic of the Knight Templar Order after it left the East, of course, was its enormous wealth. Phillip had successfully forced the papacy into submission to French politics during the reign of Boniface VIII and at the precise time the Templars were attempting to become established as a European transnational power, the King had succeeded in electing his puppet Clement V Pope and securing him in political captivity in Avignon, a fact which made the Templar's papal charter a double anachronism. The cost of subduing the papacy and of engaging in several foreign campaigns to secure his frontiers compelled Phillip to seek every form of revenue possible in a time when the royal power to tax was not unchallenged.

Phillip IV looked to the vast Templar holdings in much the same way his royal cousin, Henry VIII, eyed the monasteries in England on the eve of the Reformation two centuries later. The spoliation of the old and out-moded could be used to finance the new and perhaps necessary agenda of a young and ambitious prince. The old paid for the new.

In short, the dissolution of the Templars represented in Phillip's mind a political necessity and an economic attraction. How did Phillip accomplish his task? The story itself is an exciting one which does very much capture the imagination of the person who takes time to read it. In brief, the King relied upon charges gained from an informer who alleged that the Order was guilty of certain religious offenses, punishable in certain circumstances by the state. There were two batteries of these charges. The first were the informer's allegations themselves and the second were derived from the forced confessions of the Templars as they were obtained throughout France in October and November of 1307. Again, it helps us to understand the complexity of the situation to point out that Phillip harbored no personal animosity toward the Templars and tried diplomatically, through Pope Clement, to send them on a new Crusade or have them merge with the Hospitalers under his royal Grand Mastership, a solution which achieved success in a similar circumstance in Spain.

What were the charges? The allegations by the informer, Esquivel de



Florian, according to one authority (Edward J. Martin, *The Trial of the Templars*, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1928, pp. 32f. And list compiled in Arkon Daraul, "The Fall of the Templars," *A History of Secret Societies*, New York, The Citadel Press, 1961, p. 57) were the following:

1. The Templars put their Order before all other loyalties and moral principles, promising to defend it regardless of error.
2. They were in secret correspondence with the Muslims.
3. Novices, at their admission, were compelled to mock Christ.
4. Anyone who was guilty of exposing the Order was secretly murdered.
5. They omitted the canon from the Mass, the words: "Hoc est Corpus Meum" and worshipped the head of an idol called Baphomet (a Provencale name for Mohammed the Prophet with Satanic overtones).
6. They were addicted to immorality, especially fetal abortions of women impregnated by Templars; and homosexuality.
7. They had betrayed the Holy Land into Saracen hands.
8. They worshipped the Devil in the form of a Cat.

Forced confessions underscored three particular elements of these charges: (1) idolatry, (2) blasphemy, and (3) homosexuality, especially in a ritual form during initiation.

Which, if any, of these charges are true? The question is unanswerable in any absolute way. The evidence is too fragmentary to be certain and the volume of literature on the subject has tended to reflect the presentiments of entrenched perspectives, both Masonic and Roman Catholic, pro-Philip and pro-DeMolay. Most authorities agree that Philip was warranted for reasons of state in moving against the Templars and that there was perhaps some substance to some of the Templar charges. But evidence does not conclusively condemn or exonerate the Order from the charges.

Yet the key issue is not, today, "were the Templars guilty or weren't they." This issue does not lead us to any deeper understanding of how the Templar legends have been used for the purposes which our traditions have given them. A genuine issue is how might we view these charges in order to come to a better understanding of the reality which underlies our myths.

To point our thoughts in potentially useful directions, I will assess briefly three chief charges in terms of what we know now about their character today — heresy, sexual immorality and collusion with the Muslims.

**First Heresy:** The Templars were accused of an extreme form of Franciscanism called Joachimism. The movement preached a return to pure spirituality and the nearness of a new age, two doctrines which were considered to be seditious by the political and ecclesiastical authorities of the day. Dante, who assigns the Templars a favorable place in the *Divine Comedy*, was enamored of the Franciscans for their spiritual quality; but most people in the establishment were willing to call anyone with whom they disagreed one of the Joachimites or the near equivalent, the

Fratecelli. The fact is that heresy in the late middle ages was frequently a highly relative term, defined according to political necessity, and "heretics" were often no more than dissenters from the status quo. (J. B. Russell, ed., *Religious Dissent in the Middle Ages*, New York, John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1971, pp. 2-6).

Second, **Sexual Immorality:** The Templars were charged with performing abortions upon women who were impregnated by their fellow Knights, and with ritual homosexuality. It is difficult to take the first charge too seriously because it flies so directly in the face of the very ideal of chivalry the Templars were sworn to uphold. It is also difficult to take the second charge seriously because most historians of sexual morals would agree that the term "homosexual" was conventionally applied, in the vernacular, in much the same way as "heretic." If you didn't like one very much in the Middle Ages, a frequent epithet was "sodomite." Sodomy was a code word for severe unorthodoxy or sacrilege, whether or not the person in question deserved the title. Homosexuality was probably no more prevalent among the Templars than it was among the class of medieval clerics or even perhaps among medieval society as a whole.

Third, **Muslim Practices:** While we should take very seriously the facts that I have mentioned above, that is, the Templars lived for a very long time exposed to Muslim practices (1118-1291), and thus it is hard to say that there were no influences upon the practices of the Order; but the fact, too, is that many persons were ready to believe that the only way the cause of Christ could have failed in the East was betrayal and many were quick to remember the perfidy of Gerard de Ridfort who was guilty of treason. Worship of idols and immorality in this connection should also be considered in terms of the conventional bawdy medieval practices so well expressed in Chaucer and Boccaccio. It is unlikely that the Templars learned worship of idols from Muslims who are not only purely monotheistic but very adverse to images of any kind, as a trip to the Metropolitan Museum's Islamic collection discloses.

### THE FUNCTION OF THE TEMPLAR LEGENDS IN FREEMASONRY AND THE ORDER OF DEMOLAY

In the previous two sections I have pointed out the early character of the Order of the Temple and its nature after the fall of the Holy Land when it seriously attempted, under the Grand Mastership of Jacques DeMolay, to establish its full base of operations in France. This I have done briefly and selectively in order to portray the Templars in more realistic and factual terms than we are accustomed to view them from fraternal perspective. In this section, I want to briefly discuss how we have utilized the impelling drama of the Templars rise and demise in the Masonic Fraternity and the Order of DeMolay.

First, and most important, it is well to say the obvious. We know of the Templars in terms of our moral imagination as their story has been conveyed to us in three principle layers of tradition: the medieval



history itself, the appropriation of this history into Masonic ceremonial in 18th Century Freemasonry, when the Fraternity as we know it took its shape, and today, as it has come down to us in the 30th Degree of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite and the Order of the Temple in the York, or American, Rite. The lessons we draw from the Templars, then, are really from our own imagination of what they were like and how they were extincted, not, in terms of scholarship, of what they were really like.

This is not to say that we should pay any less heed to the moral instruction conveyed with the Templars legends in mind. On the contrary, any Freemason who has seen Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* cannot be but grateful that the form of Freemasonry that sparked the great musician's imagination to write such an enduring classic was the Templar-inspired Rite of Strict Observance, still practiced in parts of Germany and Scandinavia.

It is to say that with the Templars, as with any element of historical tradition that is used to teach specific moral lessons, we have an obligation as conscientious Freemasons, to examine the real events that inspired that tradition for a deeper and frequently useful understanding. Such efforts tend to make us more grateful for our rich and colorful traditions and, in one modest opinion, make our Gentle Craft a richer experience for those who will follow us.

Secondly, and more to the point of this essay, I would like to list a few of the ways that the demise of the Knights Templar has served the needs and desires of Freemasons at various times. This will perhaps cause us to ask ourselves how we, in 1980, use the Templar legend, how and for what purpose?

1. The Templar legend has frequently been used by anti-clerical and anti-Roman Catholic Freemasons to indict the lack of toleration characteristic of the Church before Vatican II. This has had special appeal to Masons in states that have long seen Freemasonry as an active political element (France and Spain, for example).

2. Chivalric idealism. The Templars have been frequently viewed as the pristine upholders of the medieval ideal of chivalry, an ideal that only really became selfconscious and celebrated when chivalry had ceased to be a commonly held ethic.

3. Secret or Esoteric knowledge. Many Freemasons have seen in the tenacity of the Templar legends, especially as they were shaped by the non-Christian East, the preservation of esoteric doctrines, especially in terms of Rosicrucianism. This has been a particularly popular legend among Masons because of the Templars association with the site of King Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem.

4. The cult of the martyr. For obvious reasons, Freemasons have seen in the figure of Jacques DeMolay a figure highly reminiscent of the chief architect of the Temple, Hiram the Widow's Son. For Christian Masons, especially in Germany and Scandinavia, the affinity has been particularly strong because these rites adhere more closely to the association of the Rite of Strict Observance with confessional

Christianity as it is practiced in those countries.

It should also be mentioned that people who supported the cause of the Stuart monarchy in 17 and 18th century England readily saw in Templar legends the image of their martyr king, Charles I, an image that was considerably strengthened when James II was deposed in 1688. The Scottish Rite Degree, the Thirtieth, can be traced with some accuracy to a pro-Stuart Freemason, tutor to the children of the Old Pretender, the so-called Chevalier Ramsay, exiled to France in the early 18th Century.

These functions of Templar myth and legend have at various times added to the quality of Freemasonry and have, in fact, given vitality to the Fraternity, though we might doubt the accuracy of the methods of those who have done so.

The point is that fantasy, Masonic, Templar or otherwise, should never obscure the essential quality of the Masonic experience for those who have undergone it. Such an experience can never be reduced to ceremonial, however rich; rather, it must be a balance of fraternal affection for each other, and for all men, together with a realistic grasp of who we are and where, as Craftsmen, we have come from.

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