

DARKNESS VISIBLE

*A Revelation &
Interpretation
of Freemasonry*

WALTON HANNAH

DARKNESS VISIBLE, now in its seventh edition, has provoked an almost unprecedented amount of controversy in the Church of England, and indeed far beyond. It has been praised. It has been bitterly attacked. But it has never been disproved. It continues to provide for all interested in the Masonic controversy the entire and authentic text of the Masonic ritual of the first three degrees, and the Royal Arch, the basis of the whole Masonic structure. Nothing is omitted.

Mr. Hannah has called the bluff of Masonic secrecy. He explains in great detail exactly how precise information can be obtained, checked and verified from carefully documented up-to-date sources admitted to be such by Masons themselves.

No longer can it ever be alleged that criticism of the Craft must be based on mere speculation and a few doubtful shreds torn from their context. For here is the entire context, and the reader may study it and judge for himself.

Darkness Visible has already exerted a profound influence on the clergy and laity of the Church of England; it is a provocative and curiously disturbing book which cannot be ignored. It has been written, and the Masonic rituals published, not in the interests of sensationalism or to pander to idle curiosity, but with the sincere and burning conviction that the tenets of Freemasonry are incompatible with the Christian faith.

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AUGUSTINE PRESS

CHRISTIAN
BY
DEGREES

CHRISTIAN BYDEGREES

MASONIC RELIGION
REVEALED IN THE
LIGHT OF FAITH



WALTON HANNAH

FOREWORD BY DR. E. L. MASCALL

AUGUSTINE
PRESS

CHRISTIAN BY DEGREES is a fresh contribution of great importance to the Masonic controversy. It is much more than a sequel to Mr. Hannah's earlier book *Darkness Visible* (now in its seventh edition). It gives an account of the religious history and development of Freemasonry from the earliest times to the present day. It examines with lucidity and logic the possibility of a Christian interpretation of its de-Christianized rituals, not only in the Craft and Royal Arch but also in the Mark degree, of which a full account is given.

Even more important, CHRISTIAN BY DEGREES gives an irrefutable answer to the frequently-heard Masonic argument that there are higher degrees above those of the Craft which are fully Christian and orthodox, to which the Craft is but the gateway. Mr. Hannah replies by printing the ritual of these degrees in full, from the most up-to-date authorized versions issued by these bodies themselves. The history of these Rites is also included.

Thus anyone can now study for himself the Rose Croix of Heredom, the Knights Kadosh or Thirteenth Degree, the Knights Templar, and the Knights of Malta from their own rituals, and form his own opinion as to whether or not they are expressive of orthodox Christianity or are compatible with loyal membership of the Christian Church. The author concludes that they are not. He argues that they are but revivals of early Gnostic mystery-cults against which the primitive Church was in deadly enmity. And his ruthless logic is overwhelming.

Despite the profound impression made by *Darkness Visible* the Church of England continues to side-step the Masonic issue and refuses to institute any inquiry. CHRISTIAN BY DEGREES will provoke such a storm that it is difficult to see how this equivocal attitude can be maintained very much longer.

THE NATURE OF FREEMASONRY

HUBERT S. BOX, Ph.D., B.D.

Dr. Box, a Proctor in Convocation, is a scholar of repute whose efforts to set on foot an inquiry into the theological implications of Freemasonry were followed with interest and sympathy. In this penetrating book he analyses with great learning the striking and inescapable parallels between Freemasonry and the ancient mystery-religions, based on the text of the authentic Masonic rituals themselves.

"The chapters are mainly factual, and they are certainly both informative and disturbing... this book most certainly merits the attention of the authorities of the Church."

Church Times.

"When in 1951 this subject was discussed by Convocation two facts emerged: first, Masons defended their creed with fervour bordering on fanaticism—it must not be criticized; secondly, they felt the materials for the attack must have been obtained by dishonourable means. Dr. Box has answered the second objection in the happiest possible way, by letting Masonry speak for itself; he relies entirely on its published books. The first position even now is not clarified."

Dr. W. K. Lowther Clarke in the *Chichester Diocesan Leaflet.*

"This book, a serious contribution to the subject, deserves to be answered, if it can be answered at all, in the same tradition of scholarship."

The Catholic Times.

"It investigates more deeply the underlying mystique. The case it presents is soberly and carefully presented, and reinforces Fr. Hannah's case from a more scholastic point of view. It will be of value to those who wish to make a thorough investigation of the subject."

The Church Observer.

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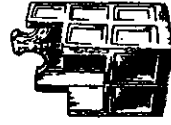
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CHRISTIAN
BY DEGREES

*Masonic Religion
revealed in the
Light of Faith*

BY
WALTON HANNAH

With a Foreword by
DR. E. L. MASCALL
OF CHRIST CHURCH · OXFORD



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F O R E W O R D

WHEN Mr. Hannah told me that he was writing a second volume on Freemasonry and asked me to contribute a Foreword, my first impulse was to decline. A great many devoted and sincere Church people, both clerical and lay, are practising Freemasons, and some of them I number among my own friends ; could it really be right, I wondered, to stir up again in the Church of England a controversy which, after a short but somewhat lively career, seemed to have sunk into oblivion ? On further reflection, however, I changed my mind. For, having read both the present book and its predecessor and having spent some time examining Mr. Hannah's copious collection of masonic rituals, it seemed to me that there were two questions which needed an answer and to which, so far as I knew, no answer had been given.

The first question is simply whether Mr. Hannah has transcribed the masonic rituals and described the masonic ceremonies with substantial correctness. If he has not, then any further discussion fails to arise. If he has travestied the masonic organisation, it should be perfectly possible for an authoritative statement to be issued to this effect. If masonic secrecy forbids precise correction of the errors, it surely cannot forbid a denial of the statements in which the errors occur. As far as Mr. Hannah's first book is concerned no such denial has been made, so far as I am aware. What has, however, manifested itself, as the present work points out, is a deliberate attempt to prevent investigation of the matter. This being so, I do not think non-masons can be blamed if they assume that Mr. Hannah's statements are in their essentials correct.

In that case, the second question is whether it is possible for a Churchman, whether clerical or lay, to take part in ceremonies such as Mr. Hannah describes, without falling into grave irreverence. No doubt familiarity breeds insensitvity, and it would be rash to suppose that those who participate in the rites invariably pay detailed attention to the precise meaning of the words which are being used. This is true of other forms of irreverence, but it is not normally held entirely to excuse them. It is important not to exaggerate here. No one, I imagine,

" In Whom do you put your trust ? " He (the Candidate) ought to be able and, may it be said, allowed to give an unprompted reply to that question. It lies at the root of the whole Masonic super-structure it is hoped to raise. And the correct answer given, what does it mean ? Grand Lodge has given it a very extensive meaning. Belief in God at all has been held to mean the sense of responsibility to a Supreme Entity and the Unity of God means the admission of one unalterable standard of right and wrong. At this time of day it is difficult to say what intelligent man, other than a professed atheist, would be excluded. The writer himself has initiated Jews, Mohammedans, Hindoos and Parsees and, at least, one Buddhist.

The Rev. J. T. Lawrence, Freemasonry, its History, Principles and Objects.

suspects the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Bishop of Norwich of being engaged in a secret plot to overthrow the Christian Faith. No one would suppose that the many devoted priests of all schools of thought who belong to one or another of the degrees of Freemasonry are trying to propagate a rival religion to Christianity. None of them (except perhaps a few eccentric such as the late Canon Covey-Crump, who appears from his writings to have been some kind of gnostic) need be suspected of anything worse than having been led by a somewhat indiscriminating impulse of enthusiasm into joining a great organisation justly celebrated for its noble charitable activities, without examining in advance (if, indeed, masonic secrecy made any such examination possible) the precise meaning of the language and the rites to which he was committing himself. I can only record the impression which, as a complete outsider, I have received from Mr. Hannah's transcription of the rituals. Assuming that transcription to be correct (and this is an assumption which my own examination of the rituals, so far as it goes, confirms), I have been both amazed and shocked at the idea of a Christian, and above all of a Christian priest, taking part in some of the ceremonies which he describes.

When I have asked priests of my acquaintance who are freemasons how they justify their membership of the masonic fraternity, they have usually replied that it provides them with opportunities of pastoral contact which they could not otherwise achieve. Some have added that there are admittedly certain anti-Christian elements in Freemasonry, and that it is very important that Christians should be freemasons as well in order to prevent these from getting the upper hand. It has sometimes been suggested that there are influential laymen who, if they were forced to choose between the Craft and the Church, would choose the former and abandon the latter. Whether any of these reasons provide valid arguments for silence the reader must judge. But I should very much like an answer to my two questions, and they cannot be avoided simply by pointing to the unquestioned integrity and sincerity of many clerical freemasons. Trial by compurgation has long been extinct in English law. It is not a question of the probity of persons but of the rational compatibility of two systems of doctrine; and it is a regrettable but undeniable fact that perfectly honest people can

be very confused in their thinking. Until the two questions to which I have drawn attention are answered frankly, and are not evaded by irrelevant references to personalities, I cannot help feeling that there will be many people like myself who, admitting with some astonishment that many devout Christians manage by some obscure mental process to be freemasons, will nevertheless continue to suspect that Freemasonry is logically incompatible with Christianity.

E. L. MASCALL.

I STARTED to write this book in answer to the numerous critics of *Darkness Visible* who have alleged that I misunderstood the nature of Freemasonry, and in particular that I overlooked entirely the "Christian implicits" of the Craft and Royal Arch degrees, and practically ignored the higher degrees to which they prophetically lead, and which are alleged to be fully Christian. A few non-Masons also deplored the fact that I had made no attempt to give any historical background or to explain how Freemasonry came into existence at all.

This original purpose grew into a larger book than was first intended, and I have attempted to trace the relationship between Freemasonry and Christianity from the beginnings of the former to the present day. Although there are many books freely available to the non-Mason which deal with the exoteric history of the order from many points of view, I have nevertheless included a certain amount of history in this volume in order to trace the religious development of the Craft from the Catholicism of the middle ages through the Deism of the eighteenth century to the woolly sentimental syncretism of the twentieth. Only thus can a possible Christian interpretation today be assessed in its proper context and perspective. As the brief appendix devoted to the "higher degrees" in *Darkness Visible* was clearly inadequate in providing information for a balanced judgment, I have expanded it in the second part of this book, and reproduced the rituals of the alleged Christian degrees in full.

The whole issue of the Christianity of Freemasonry is befogged by the popular misuse of the word Christian. It has become confused with the ethical standards upheld by Christianity (in common with other reputable religions) to such an extent that any demonstration of kindness or decency is called a "thoroughly Christian act." Which of course in a sense it is, and this is certainly a compliment to the Christian religion whose high moral standards have survived as ideals even for those who have lapsed from the Christian faith. Yet it is an ironic fact that in England today the well-meaning agnostic and the kindly pagan who have no use for creeds and sacraments and who do not accept Christ as their saviour will still feel insulted if they are called "not Christian" because they feel that this term is a

He who will not reason is a bigot ; he who cannot is a fool ; and he who dares not is a slave.

Lord Byron, note on Childe Harold's Pilgrimage.

reflection on their morals or charity. As I have no wish to cause any offence through this confusion I must stress at the outset that wherever the word Christian or Christianity is used in this book it refers to faith in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the incarnate Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the faith once delivered to the saints and proclaimed by the Church, His mystical body. It means the faith of the New Testament, the creeds, and the Fathers of the Church. For when Masons talk about the Craft as "Christian in all but name" or even as "upholding the real principles of Christianity" they are using the word in a very loose sense. "Islam (or Buddhism) in all but name" would be equally applicable. Even in the realm of ethics they seem unable to distinguish between purely natural morality common to pagan beliefs and the supernatural grace that the Christian receives in baptism which is the foundation of Christian morality—but that is another story.

The objection has been urged by a theologian of distinction who was once a Mason that Freemasonry is such an intellectual hotch-potch of pomposity and platitude that any intellectual approach or critique misses the mark completely. There is much in this point of view, and I do not wish to take it all too ponderously, and yet the very lack of intellectual content in Masonry is one of its potential dangers. This century despite its alleged scientific outlook has seen a remarkable growth of strange irrational sects and religious substitutes, Theosophy, Christian Science, British Israel, Spiritualism, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Sunday-paper astrology is popular, lucky mascots are booming, *episcopi vagantes* and charlatan faith-healers multiply. Many weird superstitions flourish. And their very irrationality is almost a source of strength to them, for they are too absurd and often too vaguely nebulous for reasoned criticism, and therefore they escape it. It is like exploring a country in an impenetrable fog, made up of a mist of vague occultism thickened by a persistent drizzle of sentimentality sometimes masquerading as Christian. (If the metaphor is confused, so is the subject). It would be unkind and grossly untrue to place Freemasonry directly under this cloud. But it is on the misty outer fringe of it.

Then there is the curious but not uncommon phenomenon of the man of brilliant intellect in one field of knowledge who loses

his critical faculty altogether in another. There is the scientist or mathematician of world fame who is attracted for some emotional reason or other into the crude mysticism of a freak religion, and will accept evidence for its authority and authenticity that he would not consider for one moment in his own sphere of knowledge. This seems analogous to the rare cases of prominent clerical Freemasons with firsts in theology.

Although many Masons such as the Rev. J. Fort Newton and Sir John Cockburn have endeavoured to raise Freemasonry into the position of a super-religion, it must be admitted that it refrains from crude infallible dogmatism; yet it has its affinities, not only with the ancient pagan and Gnostic mysteries which were similarly undogmatic but with many modern superstitions as well that are completely lacking in rationality.

"And if I am reminded of the large number of people who today run after...superstitions," writes Fr. Bede Frost in a singularly penetrating attack on some irrationalities of the age,¹ "I shall reply, What else do you expect when for half a century this professing Christian country has allowed its children to be brought up without any definite Christian teaching in its schools? For you may rest assured that what is called 'Bible teaching' is more often than not anything but Christian." But whereas freak religions have a certain external nuisance-value to the Church, Freemasonry has an internal yet parasitic influence within it, weakening its distinctive witness to the supernatural Christian faith by its syncretistic universalism and natural religion.

Of course Masons scoff at this idea. "Take a thoroughly Rotarian gathering of men, dress them up in a spectrum of aprons and collars, let them express themselves in the recitation of their rather odd and pompous ritual, touch them for a good deal of their money for their exceedingly well-conducted charities, then march them out to the bar for sherry and into the hall for a good dinner with speeches and songs, and you've got something that might strike one as very childish, but not as an esoteric cult," a Mason once explained, and the picture is not inaccurate of many Lodges. Yet behind it all, and particularly in the Royal Arch and certainly in the Rose Croix, it remains true that this same "thoroughly Rotarian gathering of men" affords

1. *Some Modern Substitutes for Christianity* (Mowbrays, 1942), p. 97.

though not consciously indulging in a separate cult, find (perhaps quite subconsciously) a certain spiritual and mystical outlet in their "rather odd and pompous ritual" and are satisfying religious instincts in a way quite other than that ordained by God in His Holy Church. If the ritual is taken at all seriously, this is quite beyond dispute. If it is not taken seriously, there is serious trifling with holy things.

The anti-Mason is frequently criticized for condemning Masonry on the evidence of quotations from Masonic mystics and prophets who, it is said, are not representative and speak only for themselves. Ward, Wilmshurst, Fort Newton, and many others of their stamp provide inexhaustible ammunition, and have proved a real embarrassment to Christian members of the Craft. The fact that such books often run into edition after edition is even more embarrassing. The further fact that hardly a number of the *Freemasons' Magazine* or the *Freemasons' Chronicle* appears without some article or reference that places the mystical content of Masonry logically in rivalry with the Church appears to be ignored.

For instance, in the *Freemasons' Chronicle* for Jan. 2, 1954, there is an article from a Grand Chaplain containing the following:—"I love this institution because it is non-denominational, or rather supra-denominational, and would like to prophesy that Freemasonry will play a large part in the unification of the diverse elements in Protestantism. It has been argued at great length as to whether or not Freemasonry is a religion. I firmly believe that it is. The tests of any religion lie (1) in its belief in Almighty God and the obligation to serve Him; (2) on the performance of duties to God and Man based on the divine law found in a divine revelation (the Bible); (3) *all religions comprehend a system of faith and worship. Freemasonry conforms to all of these*, and those who have met within its sacred precincts have experienced that inspiration which comes from being nearer to God. It may not be a complete religion since it does not attempt to minister to women and children, and because it is highly selective, *but it is nonetheless a religion.*" (Italics mine.)

This again may be an individual and unofficial opinion even though it comes from a Grand Chaplain who ought to know the mind of the Craft. The article, however, was so admired by the Brethren that the Editor of the *Freemasons' Chronicle* announced

in the next issue that owing to widespread demand it was proposed to reprint it as a leaflet for Lodge officers to distribute to new initiates. The official attitude of minimizing or even denying the religious element in Freemasonry is therefore, in the face of this and of the considerable body of literature already mentioned, disingenuous. Clearly those who regard Masonry in a religious light are far more representative of the Craft than Grand Lodge or the Masonic bishops dare to admit.

In *Darkness Visible* I rested my case on the Masonic ritual itself, with a minimum of quotations from Masonic authors. In this present book, however, there must inevitably be some such citations, because I am setting out to disprove the validity of a Christian interpretation of the ritual; hence those who have tried to prove it are clearly relevant to my case. For I maintain that if a Christian interpretation is even attempted it must inevitably lead to the Gnosticism of Wilmshurst or Waite, or to the vague sentimental caricature of historic Christianity presented by Fort Newton.

No book has ever been written, or in my opinion could be written, that explains the ritual in terms compatible with the full Christian faith. The argument always appears to run on these weary lines:—

"Freemasonry is capable of a perfectly orthodox interpretation. You mustn't judge it by individual mystics on the lunatic fringe who are not representative."

"Splendid. Could you give me some outline of that interpretation?"

"I could of course, but my solemn obligation of secrecy prevents it."

"This oath, then, only applies to explaining Masonry in terms of orthodox Christianity. It doesn't in any way hamper the streams of books commended by Grand Lodge Officers which explain it in terms of an Egyptian mystery or a Gnostic cult. Did Wilmshurst or Sir John Cockburn never take this oath?"

"Sorry, but I really must be going. We're not supposed to discuss these things with non-Masons, you know."

So the dilemma remains unresolved in the profound hush of dignified silence. Is the Church of England too mortally involved, too embarrassed, or too frightened to speak her mind?

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To: The Rev. W. Roy Foster, Vicar of St. Augustine's, Queen's Gate, London (and also to Miss Baucutt, the Vicarage Housekeeper), in sincere gratitude for great kindness, and for heroic patience displayed under fire of much nocturnal typing of the manuscript, this book is affectionately dedicated.

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I

EXIT CHRISTIANITY

They also are to be had accursed that presume to say, that every man shall be saved by the Law or Sect which he professeth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that Law, and the light of Nature. For holy Scripture doth set out unto us only the Name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be saved.

Continue to listen to the voice of nature.

Masonic Ritual, Ceremony of Raising to the Third Degree.

“THE might of the Father of Heaven with the wisdom of the glorious Son through the grace and goodness of the Holy Ghost, yet being three persons and one God be with us at our beginning, and give us grace so to govern us here in our living that we may come to His bliss that shall never have ending, Amen.” So begin the ancient Masonic Constitutions, which continue in the first general Charge to instruct the Mason “That ye shall be true men to God and Holy Church, and you shall use no error nor heresy by your understanding ...”¹

The Book of Constitutions with which the initiate into Freemasonry is presented today, however, has a sadly different preamble. The First Charge, “Concerning God and Religion,” states “Let a man’s religion or mode of worship be what it may, he is not excluded from the order, provided he believes in the glorious architect of heaven and earth, and practise the sacred duties of morality...they are taught to view the errors of mankind with compassion...” And later on, “we being only, as masons, of the universal religion above-mentioned.”

Here, then, is the bald summary of the Masonic apostasy from Christ which I propose to deal with in this chapter. Although

1. There are over a hundred manuscripts of various dates which contain these Old Charges. They are listed in the Rev. Herbert Poole’s *The Old Charges* (Masonic Record Ltd., 1924) and in *A Handlist of Masonic Documents* by Douglas Knoop and G. P. Jones (Manchester University Press, 1924), the latter book gives details as to where most of them may be found in reprints. Naturally the wording varies somewhat; my quotation (with modernized spelling) is taken from *Grand Lodge No. 1 MS., 1583.*

He divided the brethren into four classes : the first consisted of those who took no active part in the concerns either of their lodge or of mankind, who devoted themselves exclusively to meditating on the mysteries of the order, and on the meaning of the Trinity ; to studying the three elements of sulphur, mercury, and salt, or the significance of the square and the other symbols of Solomon’s Temple. These Peter could look up to ; they were the elders, including Bazdew himself ; still, he could not understand what pleasure they found in their studies, and did not feel in the least drawn towards the mystical side of freemasonry.

The second category, in which he ranked himself, was composed of adepts who, though waverers like himself, sought the right path ; and who, though they had not yet found it, did not despair of discovering it some day.

The third class, the majority, were those who saw nothing in the order beyond its external forms and ceremonies, and were satisfied with a strict observance of them without troubling themselves about their hidden meaning. Among these were Villarsky and the Worshipful Master himself.

The fourth and last were the men, at that time also very numerous, who, believing in nothing, and hoping for nothing, clung to the brotherhood simply for the sake of being intimate with rich people and getting some benefit out of the intimacy.

Leo Tolstoy, War and Peace (Book Six, Chap. VII).

CHRISTIAN BY DEGREES

Masonic Bishops and Archdeacons may continue to maintain that the Craft is "profoundly Christian in all but name", and a "handmaid of the Church," it would seem that the partial concealment of the godly black apron of their office in the Church by a second apron of more lurid colours pertaining to the handmaid leads to a mental as well as sartorial concealment and confusion. For when the Grand Orient of France went one further and eliminated the Great Architect altogether from their formularies, Grand Lodge of England broke off fraternal relations with it. English Masons do not skate over the controversy by declaring that it may be still profoundly theistic in all but name. Ignoring the fact that a French Protestant minister was at that time Grand Master of the Orient,¹ they consider that by dropping the Name of God it has become atheist, and that no believer in the deity can attend a Lodge where His Name is not honoured. But to extend this logic to the Masonic apostasy in England, to argue similarly that no believer in Christ could attend a Lodge where His Name is excluded and not honoured would be far too embarrassing.² It is one of those many awkwardnesses that must be met with dignified silence.

But let us return to history, and try to see how it all came about.

The origins of Freemasonry are still wrapped in some mystery, due to the shortage of documentary evidence. The fantasist has stepped in where the historian fears to tread, and the rank and file of the Brethren are still inclined to be over-credulous concerning the immemorial antiquity of the Craft. In this century, however, the "authentic" school is steadily gaining ground at the expense of the myth and legend, and although a *magnum opus* to bring Gould's history up to date still awaits to be written, a great deal of material towards it has been published and is readily available, and there are several excellent books of

1. The Rev. F. Desmons. The rupture occurred in 1877.
2. French Masons, with far greater clarity of logic, are not backward in pressing this point, which they consider sheer hypocrisy. See *Le Symbolisme* (Juin-juillet, 1953) in which, ironically, *Darkness Visible* received an extremely favourable review (*L'Ombre qui Luit*, by Marius Lepage). The following article in the same issue, *A propos de la Bible*, continues in the same strain.

CHRISTIAN BY DEGREES

Masonic history.¹

There are of course strong differences of opinion and interpretation in the field, but as far as possible I shall try to cite only such facts as are reasonably certain in tracing the religious development of Masonry from the middle ages to the present day.

The medieval stonemason laboured under conditions very different from those of other crafts. The weaver, the leather-worker, the silversmith or the potter could work at home, living and dying in the same community in which he was born. Their trade guilds, therefore, were more compact, stationary, and easily organized. But clearly a vast cathedral or castle requiring a very considerable skilled labour force could not be built by such stonemasons only as happened to live in the immediate district. They had to be a mobile profession, travelling from job to job. Hence in the middle ages there is less evidence than in other crafts of local stonemason's guilds—except in larger centres such as London itself, where there was presumably always enough building or repair work to keep a considerable number of local masons busy all their lives. The London Masons' Company indeed was an extremely important body which was to play a leading role in the history of the development of speculative Freemasonry.

The centre of activity was the Lodge—and the term is found in this connection as early as 1278. This was a temporary hut or shed put up near the site of the new building which served primarily as workshop, storehouse for tools, the Master's office, and so on. But it seems also to have served as a social centre. Masons living away from home would eat and possibly even sleep there; meetings and discussions took place, and a certain fraternal intimacy and fellowship would be established not unlike the atmosphere among the crew on board a ship today, or in other circumstances where men find themselves thrown

1. For a general survey of the field the following books can be recommended. D. Knoop and G. P. Jones, *An Introduction to Freemasonry* (1937) and *A Short History of Freemasonry to 1730* (1940) Manchester University Press. Lionel Vibert, *Freemasonry Before the Existence of Grand Lodge*. G. W. Daynes, *The Birth and Growth of the Grand Lodge of England, 1717-1926*. Masonic Record Ltd., 1926. Bernard E. Jones, *The Freemasons' Guide and Compendium*, Harraps, 1950. Fred L. Pick and G. Norman Knight, *The Pocket History of Freemasonry*, Frederick Muller, 1953. For the European background, Eugen Lennhoff, *The Freemasons* (translated from the German) Methuen, 1934.

together and working together away from their homes and families for prolonged periods. It has even been suggested by some that these conditions would provide an auspicious breeding ground for the esoteric elements which were later to invade the Craft.

There is little evidence of any unity or central organization knitting together these local and transient lodges. Yet the peripatetic nature of the trade made for some degree of uniformity of custom, and the rules, customs, and traditions of the stonemasons are preserved for us in the series of Constitutions or Old Charges to which reference has already been made. These documents are of supreme importance to the Masonic historian, for they are his chief source of information.

There are numerous versions, regional groups, and "families" of these Charges, as might be expected, but the normal pattern of them opens with an invocation to the Holy Trinity, and contains a history of the building trade from the beginning of time. A great deal of legendary as well as Biblical stories are introduced; the Tower of Babel is frequently mentioned, and of course King Solomon's Temple, but it is significant that the legend of the death and raising of Hiram the architect now attached to the third degree in the Masonic ritual is nowhere to be found in any of these Charges.¹ Nor, indeed, is Solomon's Temple given any special prominence at all.

Then follows the Constitutions proper, a series of rules and moral precepts which are to be binding on the mason, including an injunction to love God and the Church, sundry exhortations to keep the Charges, and a brief closing prayer.

There is hardly a trace of evidence here, or anywhere else, that the early stonemason had any esoteric interests or teaching as such, or that he attached any moral significance or spiritual symbolism to his trade or working tools in any way. Modern Freemasons are so accustomed to project backwards into time their "peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory, and illustrated by symbols" based on the building trade that this legend is indeed a long time a-dying. And where, in these early Constitutions, there were obligations of secrecy, there is prac-

1. A very similar legend attached to Noah, however, with the same necromantic significance of trying to obtain a secret from a dead body, is found later in the *Graham MS*, 1726, which significantly includes reference to the Mason Word.

tically no reason to suppose, before the introduction of the Mason Word, that anything other than trade secrets and the confidences of their own business affairs were involved. The mason was enjoined to be a good Christian and loyal Churchman, in which he probably succeeded neither better nor worse than the members of any other worthy profession.

It seems likely, however, that these Charges did provide the germ of the Masonic ritual. They were probably read out to the assembled Brethren, including the traditional history, when a newcomer or apprentice was admitted to the Lodge and took his obligation, thus forming a rudimentary initiation rite not dissimilar to those still to be found in the City Livery Companies. Other crafts had somewhat similar ceremonies and customs.

The second factor which contributed to the development of Masonic ritual was the Mason Word. No one has yet produced a plausible theory of its origins, original meaning, or etymological derivation, and possibly no one ever will, so obscure is its early history. It has become hopelessly corrupted through centuries of verbal transmission. It has emerged in print in fairly recent times as Mahabyn, Maughbin, Matchpin, Mahabone, Macbenach, all of which are very recognizable ancestors of the Word as given in the Lodge today. It is of course a great deal older than its present context of the Hiramic legend, and the meaning which is now given to it referring to the death of the builder is probably quite arbitrary. All that, however, doesn't matter in the least. Even regarded as sheer mumbo-jumbo, this Word plays an extremely important part in Masonic history and ritual.

We have seen that Masonry differed from other crafts and professions in that craftsmen tended to be peripatetic rather than static. In, say, a clothweavers' gild in the average town every member of it would be known personally, and there would be no need for secret means of mutual recognition or identification. But a man seeking employment from afar in the building of a castle or cathedral might be quite unknown to the Master Mason or to any of the Brethren, and would have no other way, apart from his own skill if given a trial, of proving himself a properly qualified stonemason. The Mason Word, then, imparted only under oath of secrecy to the skilful and initiated craftsman, seems to have fulfilled some of the functions of the Trade Union

card today. But it has been fairly well established that the Mason Word originated in Scotland, where it was established at least as early as 1550, and spread to England not before the seventeenth century.¹

Certain ceremonies became attached to the imparting of the Word. There were certain test questions and answers connected with it which may have given rise to the Masonic catechisms or lectures of later years. It was only to be imparted in a certain bodily position of the giver and receiver known as the Five Points of Fellowship. Early versions of these vary somewhat in detail and order, but substantially they were the same as found in the Lodge today—hand to hand, foot to foot, knee to knee, breast to breast, and hand over back. In course of time, then, this Word with its accompanying forms and ceremonies became more than a mere means of recognition; it was embodied in the rudiments of the ritual, where later an allegorical and even occult significance was ascribed to it. We begin to see the genesis of the speculative element of modern Freemasonry evolving from the usages and customs of the operative stonemason, though it remained on a Christian basis at least until 1723.

No very clear account has ever yet been given as to how, why, or exactly when operative stonemasons' lodges became purely speculative, and finally, except in the sphere of allegory and symbolism, divorced altogether from that trade. It is certain that gentlemen who had no connection with operative masonry became "accepted" members of Lodges. The earliest known instance is that of John Boswell, laird of Auchinlech, who in 1600 was a member of the Lodge of Edinburgh. Whether from motives of patronage, antiquarian or architectural interest, love of convivial company or sheer curiosity it is hard to say, but the fashion continued and grew. In Aberdeen the "acceptance" was in the majority by 1670, when of the forty-nine members of the Lodge only ten were operative masons.²

1. See *The Scottish Mason and the Mason Word*, by Douglas Knoop and G. P. Jones, (Manchester University Press, 1939). Exactly how or when the use of the Word spread southwards is not adequately explained. Few as the known facts are, no single theory altogether fits them.

2. *A Short History of Freemasonry to 1730*, by Knoop and Jones, p. 65. The facts are drawn from original Lodge records which date from that year.

In seventeenth-century England the "gentlemen Masons" tended to gather in separate Lodges of their own apart from the operatives, and this fact is a highly significant link in the chain between medieval Masonry and the Grand Lodge era of the eighteenth century and onwards. For in all probability it was in these Lodges of the Acceptance, free from all practical considerations connected with the building trade, that the speculative elements and particularly the ritual were developed.

At this point other theories of the origins of Freemasonry should perhaps be mentioned, one of which may probably have a substratum of truth at least as a contributory influence. We may dismiss out of hand the lunatic fringe of fantasists who profess to trace a direct historical continuity between the Craft today and King Solomon, or the Druids, the mysteries of ancient Egypt, of Eleusis, of Dionysius, or any other ancient system. If modern Masons like Sir John Cockburn have claimed that Freemasonry is the steward and guardian of the ancient mysteries of which it is the legitimate heir, all that can be conceded to them is that there are indeed striking parallels and resemblances even in the actual signs and symbols;¹ symbolism, however, is an exceedingly vague subject on which to be dogmatic and precise, and as ancient mysteries and religions had many points in common even where no common ancestor can be traced, it is hardly remarkable that the Masonic mysteries today should also show similarities to them.

We may also dismiss, for want of evidence, but with a little more respect, the discarded historical hypotheses of Dionysian Artificers, the Roman *Collegia* or the Comacine Masons as forming the genesis of the Craft. Nor have advocates of the German *Steinmetzen* or the French *Compagnonage* substantiated their case. The Knights Templar transmission theory is intriguing, but rests upon supposition, legend, and a wholly spurious charter still preserved as an oddity in Mark Masons' Hall. No theory which postulates an arcane or esoteric tradition preserved by stonemasons through Saxon, Norman, or medieval history can be supported by any evidence which a critical historian could take seriously, though popular superstitions to the contrary die very hard.

1. See *Freemasonry and the Ancient Gods*, by J. S. M. Ward (1921).

We can see a little clearer, however (though the fog still remains thick), in considering the influence of Rosicrucianism.¹ The theory has been pushed to quite ridiculous extremes; the Rev. F. de P. Castells even talks of "the plain, elementary fact that 'Freemasons' is only another name for *Rosicrucians*," and that "Rosicrucians, that is, Christian Kabbalists...or as we should call them now, Speculative Freemasons...worked in England under the shelter of the Masons' Guilds."² This, of course is fantastic over-statement.

With the publication of *Fama Fraternitatis*, *Confessio Fraternitatis*, and the *Chemical Nuptials* in the early seventeenth century, Rosicrucianism enjoyed a certain revival in Germany which spread to England. Rosicrucianism was a form of "Christian" theosophy which derived to some extent from the Jewish Kabbala; its mythical hero and founder was Christian Rosenkreutz or Rosy-Cross, and while it was indirectly interested—or some of its adepts were—in alchemy and in the elixir of life, it was in general more concerned at this time with symbolic alchemy, spiritual immortality and even reincarnation.

Whether or no Rosicrucianism was really an organized secret society or merely a general school of philosophy, it enjoyed a certain vogue in England just at the time when gentlemen, some of them of a philosophical turn of mind, were beginning to permeate the Masonic Lodges. There is no evidence whatsoever that either Robert Fludd or Thomas Vaughan, the most prominent of English Rosicrucians, had any connection with Freemasonry, but it is beyond dispute that Elias Ashmole, who if not actually a Rosicrucian, took a deeply learned interest in it, was initiated in the Lodge at Warrington in 1646. Secret societies were very much the fashion, even if only dabbled in and although the point has been strongly contested³ it seems

1. See A. E. Waite's *The Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross* (Rider & Son, 1924) and *The Secret Tradition of Freemasonry* (1937) for well-documented accounts of Rosicrucianism and its alleged influence on Freemasonry.

2. *Our Ancient Brethren the Originators of Freemasonry* (A. Lewis, 1932) pp. 96 and 281-2. The Proceedings of the Metropolitan Chapter of the Masonic Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia, particularly from Kenneth D. Mackenzie and Robert Wentworth Little, abound in absurd exaggerations and fabrications of this kind.

3. e.g. by Lionel Vibert, *The Early Freemasonry of England and Scotland*, in Vol. XXI of *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*.

likely if not probable (I hesitate to put it more strongly with the shortage of documentary evidence), particularly in view of certain theosophical elements which emerged in the Masonic ritual, that Elias Ashmole was not the only accepted Mason of that period who was interested in Rosicrucianism, and that the Craft was to some extent influenced thereby.

The well-known lines from Adamson's *The Muses Threnodie* (1638) are quoted by almost every Masonic historian to prove something or other, so I may as well quote them too:—

"For what we do presage is not in grosse,

For we be brethren of the Rosie Crosse;

We have the *Mason word* and second sight,

Things for to come we can foretell aright."

What exactly this means, and whether the "Rosie Crosse" refers to a specific Rosicrucian society, to the second degree of the Royal Order of Scotland, or to some other Rose Croix grade in Masonry, or to Craft Masonry in general, has never been established. But it appears to suggest some connection between Rosicrucian symbolism and occultism with the Mason Word, and hence with Masonry. Adamson, it has been pointed out, may have been an "accepted" member of the Lodge of Scone and Perth, No. 3.

It is even possible (but I think unlikely from the many dissimilarities) that the Hiram legend was based on the story of the tomb of Christian Rosenkreutz as told in the *Fama Fraternitatis*. The discovery of the Vault in the Royal Arch, however, resembles the Rosicrucian legend more nearly, but in both these cases the Christian element is wanting in Masonry, leaving only the Gnosticism based on legends in a Jewish context. The nature of the connection between Rosicrucianism and the Rose Croix of Heredom degree will be discussed in its appropriate chapter.

To return to history on surer grounds; in 1717 the "acceptance" at least in London had outnumbered, dominated, and largely dispossessed the operative element in the Lodges, and from now on we can drop the term "acceptance" and refer simply to Freemasons.¹

1. Strict Emulation workings, which claim to be the oldest and the norm of Masonic ritual, to this day include an anachronistic reference to operative elements. In the Explanation of the Working Tools, it says "But as we are not *all* operative Masons, but rather free and accepted or speculative, we apply these tools to our morals." Some workings and revisions remove the anachronism by omitting the word "all".

The year 1717 marks the birthday of modern Freemasonry. As we have seen, it was not something new invented out of nothing by the two clergymen, Dr. James Anderson, a Presbyterian minister, and Dr. John Theophilus Desaguliers, of French Huguenot family but who was in Anglican orders, or by any of the early associates of these leading figures. But at this period, when four speculative London Lodges came together and formed the first Grand Lodge, the movement was organized, profoundly modified,¹ and given fresh Constitutions. Other Lodges joined, new ones were formed, and Freemasonry spread and prospered.

It is by following the successive editions of the Constitutions that we may trace the religious development of Masonry. According to the Cooke MS. (ca. 1410) the operative Mason was informed that "hit behoveth hym fyrst princypally to (love) god and holy chyche & alle halowis." In Elizabethan times the reference to the saints was dropped, and the first statement was expanded in the form quoted at the opening of this chapter, in conformity with post-Reformation Anglican orthodoxy. The first edition of Anderson's Constitutions (1723), however, in conformity with the tolerant spirit of the age of reason, influenced by the prevailing Deism and natural (as opposed to revealed) religion, eliminated almost all traces of Christianity from a previously Christian fraternity. The First Charge, "Concerning God and Religion," read as follows:—"A Mason is oblig'd by his Tenure, to obey the Moral Law ; and if he rightly understands the Art, he will never be a stupid Atheist nor an irreligious Libertine. But though in ancient Times Masons were charged in every Country to be of the Religion of that Country

1. Towards the end of the nineteenth century a curious theory was put forward for the first time that the old operatives, incensed at being swamped out by the speculatives, withdrew themselves and maintained a continuous and separate organization, preserving an ancient ritual, side by side with Grand Lodge up to the present day. A certain Clement E. Stretton professed to have these rituals, and endeavoured to revive the cult. The rituals which he produced, however, have not the slightest internal evidence of antiquity, nor is there a scrap of documentary evidence to substantiate his claims. The Channel Row (Westminster) Assemblage of Operative Masons, however, continues to meet and work these rituals in a much-edited form. For a sympathetic account of their claims (which are ignored by most serious historians as fantasy) see J. S. M. Ward's *Freemasonry and the Ancient Gods*, pp. 70-4, and a series of articles running through 1951 and 1952 by Miss M. C. Debenham in the co-Masonic journal *The Speculative Mason*.

or Nation, whatever it was, yet 'tis now thought more expedient only to oblige them to that Religion in which all Men agree, leaving their particular opinions to themselves ; that is, to be good *Men and true*, or Men of Honour and Honesty, by whatsoever Denominations or Persuasions they may be distinguished..."

The phrase "'tis now thought more expedient" seems to indicate that a deliberate change was being consciously effected in the religious nature of the Craft, involving what no less an authority than the late J. Heron Lepper called "the abandonment of what was undoubtedly an Ancient Landmark."¹ The Rev. W. W. Covey-Crump, however, late Canon of Ely Cathedral and a considerable Masonic scholar, declared that "the intention of those who introduced the change in 1722 was not to alter the essentials of Masonry, but rather to modernize the expression of them...They were legislating to strengthen the philosophic (I am inclined to say 'Kabalistic') outlook of a new party which had recently taken up an almost moribund Craft Guild ; and, by extending its aims and influence, was giving it a fresh lease of life among men of much higher social position."

Bro. Ivor Grantham contends that the "Religion in which all Men agree" is the fundamental faith of those who accept all that is implied in the conception of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man "²...a sentiment not striking in its originality which is echoed *passim* in a great deal of Masonic literature today.

The historical preamble to these same Constitutions was re-written. The Augustan Age in its classical elegance looked down with condescension on the "native wood-notes wild" of

1. The phrase 'ancient landmark' has a technical significance in Freemasonry, referring to fixed and unalterable principles of the Craft which must not be tampered with. Every Master on attaining the Chair of a Lodge vows to uphold and maintain them, and Grand Lodge itself is precluded by the Constitutions from even discussing their alteration. The loop-hole is, of course, that no one knows precisely what the Ancient Landmarks are. There have been many lists, but no official definition.
2. These three quotations are from *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, Vol. LVI Part 1. Article and discussion on *Freemasonry and the Idea of Natural Religion*, p. 38. The article was by Knoop and Jones, read by the former, as Mr. P. G. Jones is not a Freemason. See also *The Religion of Early Freemasonry* (Chicago University Press, 1939) by C. H. Lyttle, which takes the same line.

its predecessors, and rather despised all things medieval. In this spirit Dr. Anderson had a contempt for the ancient 'Gothic' constitutions, and although his history is no more historical or less legendary than those which preceded it, it is written in an attempted approximation to Johnsonian English. In this history there is one reference only to Our Lord, and that in brackets. After a reference to the Emperor Augustus follows "in whose Reign was born God's Messiah, the great Architect of the Church." That is all. After 1815 the historical preamble, which had been extensively revised, was dropped from the Constitutions, and the apostasy as far as these official formularies are concerned was complete. On the other hand, the conventional Christian endings to certain of the prayers in the ritual appear to have lingered on until the Union of 1813, and occasionally to the present day in Ireland.

In 1738 there was a further revision of the Constitutions, and the passage quoted was re-drafted to read: "In ancient Times the Christian Masons were charged to comply with the Christian usages of each Country where they travell'd: or work'd. But Masonry being found in all Nations even of divers Religions, they are now generally charged to adhere to that Religion in which all men agree (leaving each brother to his own particular Opinion) that is, to be good men and true, men of Honour and Honesty, by whatever Names, Religions, or Perswasions [sic] they may be distinguished." The further revision of 1756, however, harked back to the earlier statement that in ancient times Masons were enjoined to be of the religion of any country in which they might happen to reside, whether Christian or not.

During the eighteenth century another Masonic body arose in opposition, or at least in rivalry, to the new Grand Lodge. The history of this period is intricate and obscure and it need not concern us in detail; this body, however, became known as the "Ancients", or Atholl Masons (due to the long tenure of the Grand Mastership by the Dukes of Atholl), and the original Grand Lodge (which they accused of innovations) as the "Moderns." It used to be thought that the Ancients were actually a schism or break-away from the parent body, but more recently the view has gained ground that, although certain individual Lodges and individual Masons may have changed

allegiance from one to the other, the Ancients grew up quite independently, enjoying strong support from Ireland, incorporating Lodges that had never come within the orbit of the Grand Lodge of London. To complicate things still further, there seems to have been a third body, not very closely defined, whom J. Heron Lepper calls "Traditioners," who were nominally in obedience to the Moderns, but strongly in sympathy with the Ancients.¹

Bitterness, strife, and rivalry increased between the two bodies. Bernard E. Jones tabulates the innovations with which the Moderns were charged;² many of these were concerned solely with matters of ritual, the office of Deacon, the preparation of Candidates, and so on. An important difference was the position of the higher degrees which were coming into favour, the Royal Arch in particular. The Moderns tended to set their face against them. From the religious point of view, however, it appears that the Ancients objected to the de-Christianizing policy of the Moderns, both in the Constitutions and in the ritual. They accused the Moderns of omitting prayers altogether (which was probably unfounded) and of neglecting Saints' Days, particularly the feasts of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist, the two Patrons of Freemasonry.

As regards ritual details, Ancient and Modern, the historian is very much in the dark, for most of our information comes from spurious disclosures which may or may not be accurate.³ The semi-authentic printed ritual published as an aide-memoire to the Masons themselves did not begin to appear until well on in the nineteenth century.

1. Yet another body was the short-lived "Grand Lodge of England South of the River Trent", which lasted from 1779-1889. This was founded on a personal quarrel, and had little importance. There is also some rather scrappy evidence for the existence of an independent Grand Lodge of York, possibly founded some years before 1717, and continuing until the close of the eighteenth century.
2. *Freemasons' Guide and Compendium*, pp. 201-2. This book gives the clearest account of the whole complicated dispute that I have yet come across.
3. The most important of these is Prichard's *Masonry Dissected* (1730). From internal evidence, and from the consternation which it caused Grand Lodge, as shown in the minutes, most Masonic historians today regard it as substantially reflecting the ritual of its time, and cite it as evidence. There is still a slight coyness in admitting this too publicly, and when the Leicester Lodge of Research reproduced it in facsimile, the more secret portions were significantly omitted! This in itself seems an admission.

CHRISTIAN BY DEGREES

The Constitutions of the Ancients, however, are informative, and fully substantiate the fact that Christianity though perhaps watered down, was still maintained. Bearing the exotic title of *Ahirman Rezon: or, A Help to a Brother*,¹ these Constitutions are the work of an indefatigable Irishman Laurence Dermott, for many years Grand Secretary to the Ancients. Dermott borrows plentifully from Anderson where it suits him to do so, and yet, from the second edition onwards, the note of rivalry and even hostility creeps in. The ponderous fatuity of Dr. Anderson's excursions into history are deliciously satirized in a foreword; the claim that Adam was a Freemason, for instance, must clearly be improved upon, so Dermott tells us that "having tried my Pen...I began to flourish away in a most admirable Manner, and in a few Days wrote the first Volume of the History of Freemasonry, wherein was a full Account of the Transactions of the first Grand Lodge, particularly the excluding of the unruly members, as related by Mr. Milton." But alas! this history never saw the light of day, for a neighbour's puppy broke in and ate most of the work which he had expected "would outlast the teeth of time." The Constitutions, therefore, with many apologies, were not to be prefaced by a history.

Dermott in a more serious vein declares later, "A Mason is obliged by his Tenure to believe firmly in the true Worship of the eternal God, as well as in all those sacred Records which the Dignitaries and Fathers of the Church have compiled and published for the Use of all good Men; So that no one who rightly understands the Art, can possibly tread in the irreligious paths of the unhappy Libertine, or be induced to follow the arrogant Professors of Atheism or Deism..." He allows for Jews in spite of this, yet apparently avoided the charge of infidelity by drawing a definite line between Jewish and Christian Lodges. Certainly prayers are provided for each; the Christian prayer for the initiate concludes "Endue him with a Competency of thy divine Wisdom, that he may, with the Secrets of Freemasonry be able to unfold the Mysteries of Godliness and Christianity. This we most humbly beg, in the Name, and for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

1. First Edition, 1756. My own copy, from which I quote, is the fourth edition, printed in Dublin, 1780.

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Amen." The Irish Constitutions, which contain a certain amount of ritual matter, continue to this day to include a Christian prayer for permissive use in the third degree ceremonies.

By the end of the eighteenth century a reconciliation was in the air. Both sides seem to have tired of the long quarrel with its mutual recriminations and bickerings, and in 1813 amidst scenes of general relief and rejoicings the two Grand Lodges, with the Duke of Kent as Grand Master of the Ancients and his brother the Duke of Sussex of the Moderns met together in a Lodge of Reconciliation. Certain Articles of Union, drawn up by a previous Lodge of Promulgation,¹ were read and approved, and the United Grand Lodge of England came into being with the Duke of Sussex as its first Grand Master.

There was compromise on both sides. The Moderns gave way on the Royal Arch, which was accepted by them in a face-saving expedient which defined it as not a separate degree, but as the completion and fulfilment of the third. The Ancients gave way on the other "higher degrees," which were jettisoned. Some carried on independently and for a while precariously; many eventually found a home under the hospitable roof of Mark Masons' Hall. But it was declared definitely in Article 11 that "pure Ancient Masonry consists of three degrees, and no more: viz. those of the Entered Apprentice, the Fellow Craft, and the Master Mason, including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch."² The second part of the same Article, however, not being in the present book of Constitutions, is less well known. It runs:—"But this article is not intended to prevent any Lodge or Chapter from holding a Meeting in any of the Degrees of the Orders of Chivalry, according to the Constitutions of the said Orders." This seems to allow a loophole for the Knights Templar. Grand Lodge and Grand Chapter, however, make no claims of jurisdiction over these Orders, and they are given in this article no more than a quasi-recognition. A few Lodges

1. These Articles of Union may be found in the posthumous editions (fourteenth and after) of Preston's *Illustrations of Masonry*, which was edited and brought up to date by Dr. Oliver; also in *The Craft and the Royal Arch*, by W. H. Topley; and in any Masonic Encyclopædia.

2. The Royal Arch is not actually controlled by Grand Lodge but by Grand Chapter. For an account of the close relationship between these bodies, see note p. 74.

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and Chapters may have continued for a while to work Templar degrees, but these Orders soon withdrew into jurisdictions of their own, and the clause became a dead letter.

There was compromise all round. Instead of the Festivals of the two Sts. John to which the Ancients were devoted there was substituted St. George's Day, a good patriotic observance having no particular connection either with Freemasonry or (in practice) with religion.¹ The Moderns sacrificed several ritual and ceremonial points which were deemed innovations, and in general the ritual of the Ancients was adopted. Each body had its own version of the Mason Word, and both of them were used. But the Ancients sacrificed their Christianity. Looking at English Masonry as a whole, it may be said that 1813 rather than 1717 or 1723 was really the date on which the final apostasy became complete. The Grand Master, the Duke of Sussex, was both an autocrat and a convinced Deist, and the spirit of Anderson and his associates triumphed. Non-Christian Universalism and natural religion were established. Only such prayers were offered to the Great Architect as could not prove a stumbling-block to the Jew nor foolishness to the Greeks by being offered in Christ's name. The first of the Charges in the new Constitutions, already quoted, excluded only the stupid atheist and irreligious libertine from that body which has since been described as "more than a Church...not a religion but is Religion, a worship in which all good men may unite that each may share the faith of all."² Such is the position today.

1. The original Articles of Union, it is true, stipulated that the Annual Festival should take place on or soon after the feast of St. John the Evangelist, but this was very soon altered. The Constitution now reads "The Wednesday next following St. George's Day".

2. The Rev. J. Fort Newton, *The Builders* (7th edition, 1949) p. 180.

II

THE GROWTH OF UNIVERSALISM

"It is absolutely useless for a Frenchman to try to understand English Masonry unless he realizes that the Crown, the Anglican Church, and the United Grand Lodge of England are one God in three persons."

Marius Lepage, in *Le Symbolisme*, Oct. 1953.

THE few small shreds of specific Christian symbolism which survived the Union of 1813, more by accident than by design and divorced from any Christian context, in the ritual set forth by the Lodge of Reconciliation will be considered in the following chapter. In the meantime, let us trace the religious development of Freemasonry from the Grand Lodge era to the present day as reflected by contemporary literature apart from the constitutions, charges, and ritual. What sort of men were they, and what part did Masonry play in their lives?

Although in the seventeenth century there was probably some influx among the Acceptance of gentlemen philosophers interested in Rosicrucianism and occultism, it would be hazardous indeed to maintain that this element dominated the Craft, even though they probably influenced it. The membership in general seems to have been largely artisan, with still a sprinkling of operative masons. Very little is known of Masonic activity in the Lodge in the seventeenth century, but the establishment of Grand Lodge raised both the prestige of Freemasonry and the social status of its membership in the eighteenth. Membership increased noticeably when in 1721 the Duke of Montague became the first noble Grand Master, and this lesson has been thoroughly taken to heart by the Craft. It is now in the Constitutions that the Grand Master must be of the nobility, and Royalty when willing is welcomed with even more profound gratification. The Ancients, not to be outdone, cast about feverishly for a nobleman before they found one in the Earl of Blessington in 1756. And incidentally in Ireland the present Grand Master, Raymond F. Brooke, is the first untitled person to occupy the throne since its foundation in 1725, but this may be in deference to republican Eire. Snobbery is a very general human failing

not altogether absent even in Freemasonry.¹

Of the four Lodges which came together to form the first Grand Lodge, three seem to have been mainly artisan, while the fourth, the *Rummer and Grapes* (named, as was the early custom, after the tavern in which it met) had as its Master the Duke of Richmond, and among its members such notabilities as Payne and Desaguliers (both of whom became Grand Masters) and Anderson. As membership increased and fresh Lodges were warranted the proportion of gentlemen (I use the word for convenience in the sense which the eighteenth century applied to it) rose; Freemasonry enjoyed a vogue in the fashionable world when clubs were becoming popular, and the secrecy and conviviality of the Craft made a wider appeal in that latitudinarian and unspiritual age than its moral or arcane teachings. Contemporary Lodge minutes and accounts, as well as many pamphlets and articles in attack and in defence which appeared at this time, certainly suggest this.² The rituals, as far as one can tell, were briefer than today, and consisted largely of rehearsals of the lectures or catechisms. At times initiates would be pushed through the three degrees in the same evening and the actual ceremonies or "makings" had not yet acquired the prosy platitudinous moralizings that accrued in the following century, when Masonry became thoroughly bourgeois in outlook. The banquets with their multitudinous and deeply-drunk toasts and boisterous Masonic songs were drawn out,³ William Hogarth's celebrated picture "Night," which shows the inebriated Master of a Lodge with apron and jewel, drenched with the contents of a chamber-pot emptied over him from an upstairs window, being escorted from a tavern which has been identified as the *Rummer and Grapes* by his Tyler with sword and key, has been

1. It is usually a by-law of Naval and Military Lodges that no sailor below the rank of Petty Officer, or no soldier below the rank of Sergeant, is eligible for initiation in this universal Brotherhood.
2. Originals of these eighteenth-century pamphlets are scarce and treasured collectors' pieces, but most have been reprinted or reproduced in the transactions of the various Research Lodges (see *A Handlist of Masonic Documents* cited p. 17 which gives details). Two of the expositures, *Three Distinct Knocks* and *Jachtin and Boaz* are still available in cheap modern editions (William Reeves Ltd.)
3. See article *An Apollinaric Summons* in *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, XXXV, p. 31.

denounced as almost treacherous anti-Masonry. This, however, is to judge the eighteenth century by the standards of the twentieth. Certainly Hogarth was himself a Freemason, but he satirized his Brethren with no more severity than he satirized other sections of society. I think the eighteenth century would no more have called Hogarth anti-Masonic than we would call *Punch* anti-clerical today for printing occasional jokes about pale curates. It was a rougher age, and satire was accordingly more crude.

There is little evidence, indeed, to suggest that the spiritual side of Freemasonry was taken very seriously, but on the other hand there is no reason to think that in their social junketings they were either better or worse than the spirit of the age. The interest taken in Masonic charities was far less intense than today, and indeed even proportionately they were on a smaller scale, but here they were somewhat in advance of an un-humanitarian century. Freemasonry aroused considerable publicity, and was attacked and exposed in a veritable spate of pamphlets. Some merely pandered to curiosity, like Samuel Prichard's celebrated *Masonry Dissected* in 1730, but it seems likely that they were also used as *aides-mémoire* by Masons themselves. Others satirized, poking fun at the Masonic apron (always good for a laugh), ceremonies, public processions, and absurd claims to historical grandeur and antiquity. Some, like Prof. Robison at the close of the century in *Proofs of a Conspiracy* attacked Masonry as the hidden hand of revolution and conspiracy, and although he concentrated on Continental Lodges and secret societies, English Masonry was besmirched by it. Some brought charges of licentiousness and profanity. Some merely attacked.

The fact that there were fewer attacks on Masonry from the religious point of view corroborates the impression that the social and convivial aspects of Masonry predominated. But in these early days of the Grand Lodge era, the Lodge was not as popular with the higher clergy as it is today,¹ and in any case Hanoverian clerics tended to be latitudinarian and even worldly. As early as 1726 the anonymous author of *The Free-*

1. The first Freemason to be Archbishop of Canterbury appears to have been Dr. Howley, from 1828-48, a latitudinarian who opposed the Oxford Movement. The second, Dr. Geoffrey Fisher.

*Masons Accusation and Defence*¹ wrote :—"But, say you, there are Men of Quality, Dignitaries of the Church, and many others of Consideration, *Free Masons*. To which I answer, that there is no Act of Parliament yet in force to oblige every Man of Quality to be a Man of Sense...I should be very sorry to hear that any Clergyman whatever should so far degrade his sacred Function as to contaminate it with the wretched Fooleries of *Baccanalian Riots*. I hope the *Apron*, which is one of the Symbols of your Order, was never put on by any Man on whom the Bishop had laid his Hands, and endued the Robe of Righteousness. If any Person has so done, it has consequently made his Ordination of none Effect ; and were I a Prelate in Power, I would severely punish such Wretches who should put over or under that sacred Habit, the Trappings of the Devil ..."

Yet even in the early eighteenth century there were occasional Masons who made pretentious religious claims for the Craft, and therefore opponents who stigmatized it as a Gnostic mystery-cult. Among the former was Edward Oakley, Provincial Senior Grand Warden in Carmarthen, who in 1728 addressed his Brethren in the following terms. After referring to Masonry as a "sacred mystery" he said :—"Inasmuch as it hath pleased the Almighty One, Eternal, Unalterable God, to send out his Light, and his Truth, and his vivifying Spirit, whereby the Brotherhood begins to revive again in this our Isle, and Princes seek to be of this sacred Society, which hath been from the Beginning and always shall be : the Gates of Hell shall never prevail against it...for since God, my dearest Brethren, is for us, who can be against us ? Ye are living Stones, built up a spiritual House, who believe and rely on the chief *Lapis Angularis*, which the refractory and disobedient Builders disallowed ; you are call'd from Darkness to Light ; you are a chosen Generation, a royal Priesthood."²

Among those who attacked Masonry on religious grounds was a certain "Verus Commodus" who wrote in a letter to a friend³

1. Reprinted in the *Leicester Masonic Reprints*, 1920, and in *Early Masonic Pamphlets*, by Douglas Knoop, G. P. Jones, and Douglas Hamer, 1945.
2. *Early Masonic Pamphlets*, p. 214.
3. This letter was appended to the second edition of *The Grand Mystery of Free Masons Discover'd*, 1725. It has been reprinted in *Early Masonic Pamphlets*, pp. 136-140.

"...it is observable, That the Creed of St. Anthanasius is treated very scurvily and opprobriously amongst divers of their Principals ; and the Divinity (nay even the Divine Accomplishments of our Saviour) are handled by some of those Wretches, with a most shameful buffoonry and Contempt...But now, Sir, to draw a Conclusion ; and to give my Opinion seriously, concerning these prodigious Virtuosi ; my Belief is, That if they fall under any denomination at all, or belong to any Sect of Men, which has hitherto appear'd in the World, they may be ranked among the GNOSTICS ; who took their Original from Simon Magus ; These were a Sect of Men, which ridicul'd not only Christianity, but even Rational Morality ; teaching, That they should be sav'd by their capacious Knowledge and Understanding of no Mortal Man could tell what. They babbled of an amazing Intelligence they had, from nobody knows whence ; They amus'd and puzzled the hare-brain'd, unwary crowd, that follow'd 'em, with superstitious Interpretations, of extravagant Talismanic Characters, and abstruse Significations, of uncommon Kabalistic Words ; which exactly agrees with the Proceedings of our Modern Free Masons...I must take the Freedom to say, That there are Schisms and Fractions, more than enough already, in our most Excellent Religion."

Other passages could be quoted, but in the main the eighteenth century attacks on the Craft were centred on its puerilities and insobriety. The publication of William Preston's *Illustrations of Masonry* in 1772, and more particularly of *The Spirit of Masonry* by William Hutchinson in 1775, with the official sanction of Grand Lodge, did a great deal to raise Freemasonry from a convivial association to the school of religious and moral philosophy which it has since become to so many of its members. Both books were received with great enthusiasm, and set the tone for the philosophical Masonic writings of the following century. Hutchinson's interpretation of the third degree as symbolizing the new law of Christ rising from the death and corruption of the old law of Judaism will be considered in another chapter in the context of the Hiramic legend. In 1814 Jonathan Ashe's *Masonic Manual* appeared, which followed Hutchinson's theme closely, and had little to add to it. Although the theory of an exclusively Christian interpretation of Masonry became

progressively untenable as the Craft developed in universality, it survived what might have been considered an official death-blow in 1813 and was continued by some writers even in the nineteenth century. But even Hutchinson is far from consistent, and his followers became less so.

The most prolific Masonic writer of the nineteenth, or indeed of any century, was an Anglican vicar, the Rev. George Oliver, who produced dozens of books between 1823 and 1875. Each book, credulous and historically worthless, seems to produce a new theory and a new interpretation. His main thesis, however, is that Freemasonry was revealed in all its ancient undenominational purity to Adam by God Himself, and was transmitted through the patriarchs, surviving the flood, reaching its climax in the days of King Solomon, and eventually passing into the Christian tradition, of which Hiram is a type. The heathen mysteries of Egypt and Babylon, of Greece and Rome, are not, therefore, the ancestors of Freemasonry, but corrupt and spurious offshoots from it. But just as the religion of the Old Testament patriarchs was a pure undogmatic theism, so Masonry today is open to all believers in a one true God, though at the same time it is thoroughly Christian. Poor Dr. Oliver! He wrote too much and too often. No one today takes his version of Masonic history seriously, but his legacy of woolly confusion between Christianity and universalism still hangs over the confused utterances of many a Masonic Anglican priest and prelate to this day.

Two people in the nineteenth century saw this insoluble dilemma and attempted, each in his own way, to face it squarely and logically. Neither of them received the attention which the subject merited, nor left any lasting impression on Masonic thought. The first was a Devon Mason, M. C. Trevilian, a name almost unknown to modern Freemasons. His misgivings on the compatibility of Freemasonry with Christianity were brought to a head, apparently, by a completely non-Christian Masonic funeral service for a certain John Rippon in Exeter in 1838, a ceremony which excited a good deal of local controversy. Trevilian (a layman) left the Order as a result, and in 1849 he published over his own name *A Letter on the Antichristian Character of Freemasonry to the Rev. Wm. Carwithin, D.D., Deputy Provincial Grand Master for the County of Devon,*

which, with a lengthy appendix, gave logical and devastating arguments against the Christian becoming a Freemason. Christ, he claimed, had been cast aside, and a purely natural religion substituted for Him. In the Lodge "the Bible", he says, "is mentioned as the record, not of the great work achieved for us of Salvation, but of holy precepts wherewith to achieve our own," and he cites among other passages the prayer said over each initiate that he may achieve true godliness, not through Christ, but "by the secrets of our Masonic art." "The faith described," he declares, "is pure Deism; it may be very pious and sincere; but it is not the faith of the Christian but of the genuine Deist."

In dealing with the apostasy of omitting all Christian endings to Masonic prayers so that non-Christians may be spared offence, he faces the argument heard then as now, that to the Christian the very mention of God tacitly includes Christ. "I was corrected," says Trevilian, "by the observation of a Rev. Gentleman, 'Can any Trinitarian address prayer to God, without in that term acknowledging Christ as an integral part of the Deity addressed?' I would wish to ask him now whether, having obsequiously put aside the name of Christ, we are at liberty likewise (through the same regard for the feelings of others) to put aside absolutely His work and mediation; and to consider these to be intrinsically as needless as the mention of the Name?...No, there is no room for any such quibbling subterfuge." The same Rev. Gentleman, however, we are told, later on also succeeded from the order on conscientious grounds.

Trevilian develops at length the comparison between the apostasy of the Christian Mason and the denial of Peter. At our Lord's betrayal and passion, he points out, there was a mixed crowd consisting of both enemies and friends. "And what was the most bitter ingredient in the cup of sorrow which this Man of sorrows was presented with on that eventful night? Was it the ill-treatment and buffetings of his persecutors? No; this he took voluntarily upon Him...it was the desertion of his friends, and particularly the anti-Christian declaration of Peter; this moved His gentle spirit, and was grief to his soul...The crime of the Christian Freemason is that, in a similar assembly, i.e., in an assembly where the name of Christ is by many held in contempt, and His mediation refused, he also does not stand by his Master,

but in complaisance to his fellow-Masons suppresses his knowledge of Him, a silent act which, speaking as loudly as words, may be regarded as equivalent to an open denial...As to the wrong done, the denying on the one hand, and the suppression on the other, Christ being in each case disowned, surely no one will say that there is any great difference between them. Peter denies that Christ is his Lord and Master; the Christian Freemason suppresses or suspends the pretensions of Christ to be his necessary Mediator and Intercessor in prayer...*disowning Christ for the time being*; and both answering to the prophecy (Psalm VI, 12) that it should be the 'friends' of Christ who should 'bring reproach upon Him'...Let us make the addition of *motive* to each. The parallel will then stand thus. Peter disowned Christ *through fear*; the Christian Freemason disowns Him *through complaisance*...to disown Christ on such an account is nothing less than to betray Him...to 'crucify Him afresh, and to put Him to an open shame.' Indifference is the basest quality of the mind." And these words of Trevelian ring as true, as apposite and as unanswered today as when they were written.

The second writer to face the dilemma saw it from a more practical and less theological angle; although considerably disturbed by it he never left the Craft. This was H. J. Whympcr, who had the rank of Past Deputy District Grand Master for Punjab. He was active in Freemasonry in India at a time of expansion when many non-Christians, mainly Moslem and Hindu, were being initiated into the Lodges, and the anomaly of different faiths joining in the same religious ceremonies startled him into writing *The Religion of Freemasonry* in 1888. This book started at a disadvantage. The great Masonic scholar W. J. Hughan, far better versed than Whympcr in Masonic history, had promised to write an introduction before he saw the manuscript; when he came to read it he found himself in disagreement at every turn with Whympcr's main thesis, but the only solution he himself suggests is that unless the various religions "are prepared to practise as well as expect toleration by thus maintaining the actual and obligatory foundations of the Society, the continuity and identity of the Institution cannot be permanently and uniformly preserved...by thus extending the scope of our Ancient and Honourable Society, we are adding

immensely to its beneficial influence and practical usefulness, especially abroad."

Whympcr starts, of course, with the assumption that Freemasonry is a religious fraternity. "We can have no concern, neither can we at all sympathize with a brother who can read or repeat our ritual and yet attach no religious meaning to it," he writes. "We maintain that the upholders of the belief that no connection exists between Freemasonry and religion, depend entirely on their own individual assertions, all the weight of evidence being on our side."

On less sure grounds he continues to argue that the religion of Freemasonry is still Christianity, despite the excision of all specific references to it in the Charges, constitutions, and ritual. He cites here and there from Dr. Oliver's *Discrepancies of Freemasonry* to justify his point. Briefly, his main argument is that Freemasonry prior to the Grand Lodge era was Christian, that its Christianity was an unalterable landmark, that no minute is preserved expressing a deliberate intention of removing that landmark, therefore it has never been removed. Hughan's introduction rightly demolishes this argument, and points out, particularly from the changed wording of the Charges, that Masonry at that period tended away from Christianity to "cosmopolitanism and religious universality."

But Whympcr is unanswered and unanswerable when he points out the inconsistency and insincerity of the position of the "Volume of the Sacred Law" in Masonic ceremonies. In English-speaking countries and where the membership of the Lodge is predominantly Christian in background, this volume was (and is) the Bible, containing both Old and New Testaments. Indeed it is doubtful whether the use of any other volume was ever envisaged in the early days of Grand Lodge. But particularly in India the Koran and the Vedas came to be substituted for it, especially for the oaths, and it became established by authority that the V.S.L. need not necessarily be the Bible at all. Yet the ritual remained more or less constant for Lodges of all faiths. Hence the unresolved absurdity, if not blasphemy, of passages in the ritual referring to it as "the unerring standard of truth and justice," or "the sacred writings to govern our faith," or "the record of God's revealed will" when different and quite contradictory "revelations" are referred to. How can such a

medley be "unerring?" So Whympet will not have it that the V.S.L. can be other than the Bible. "The ties which should exist between a brother and that which he esteems to be the Word of God have been, and are being, relaxed, and will soon be entirely severed by the light and careless feeling necessarily engendered by the doctrine that any book is good enough to be esteemed the Volume of the Sacred Law. A Christian cannot view this state of things with satisfaction. In the words of a well-known writer, 'he feels that to reduce our blessed Lord into the category of human seers is practically to dethrone Him. Christianity will tolerate no rival. They who wish to raise a tabernacle for some other Master, be it even for the greatest worthies of the old economy—a Moses or Elias—must be warned that Christ, and Christ alone, is to be worshipped.'"

Universality, therefore, is preposterous. "Has this effort to suppress Christian allusions and connections been attended by any good?" asks Whympet, in words strongly reminiscent of Trevilian, Penney Hunt, and other anti-Masons. "Has it even helped to make a more consistent universal system?... On the one hand the Christian has stifled his feelings, he has cancelled and done away with Christian allusions, so as not to cause offence to others, and to obtain universality...on the one side the Christian refrains from speaking of Christ as his Saviour, and on the other hand our Hindoo brethren openly assert that Jesus Christ's position is on a mere level with Zoroaster, Mahomed, Khrishna, Rama, and others...the Christian alone has abandoned his religion, whilst the brethren of all other beliefs have asserted theirs."¹

Whympet suggests the solution that Lodges of different religions displaying different sacred books should be grouped under separate Masonic jurisdictions, with the ritual modified if necessary in each, yet retaining rights of mutual visitation. This suggestion has of course never been adopted or even seriously considered. Hughan stated in his introduction that it would "weaken the unsectarian character of the Institution," and the spirit of universalism was far too strong for Whympet even to obtain a serious hearing. The Bible is still only optionally the Volume of the Sacred Law. So to this day his dilemma remains unresolved and Christian Masons continue to be vague and

1. Op. cit. p. 205.

myopic on these fundamental issues.¹

The twentieth century has seen a certain social change in Freemasonry. Although nobility and even Royalty have never been lacking to assume the Grand Mastership, Freemasonry was predominantly *petit bourgeois* in membership, consisting mainly (of course there are many exceptions) of small traders, artisans, and shopkeepers. An effort to spread its membership among intellectuals resulted in the formation of Old School and University Lodges on a larger scale;² this raised the proportion of the professional classes, the social prestige of the Craft, and to a startling extent the number of Anglican clergy. That this movement has coincided with the growth of liberalism, pan-protestantism, and the decay of dogmatic faith in the Church of England is clearly an historical fact; to hazard a guess as to the identity of a cart or a horse in this coincidence must, I think, be left to future historians. Suffice it to say that the two go together, and that there are clerical Masons who proudly proclaim a direct harnessing between them, and that the pattern is already established. The Rev. J. Fort Newton, for instance, wrote: "The various sects...are moving towards the Masonic position, and when they arrive, Masonry will witness a scene which she has prophesied for ages...our little dogmas will have their day and cease to be, lost in the vision of a truth so great that all men are one in their littleness."³ The ultimate

1. "Freemasonry being embracing all religions, the V.S.L. is for each candidate the Book of his Faith by which is pledged his promise, as proves the well-known fact that in the Far East, not one but several such volumes may be found in use within the same Lodge, and even the same day's ceremonies, each in turn as the one binding on he who pledges himself upon it. Being thus undenominational in character, as it has become since the Union of 1813, there can be no right cause for the Master to read any passage of the Book of one particular faith to a gathering comprising adherents to others, and it could be regarded as a breach of the understanding."
"The Sacred Volume in Freemasonry is in fact a *Symbol*, just as are the Square and the Compasses, and displayed to the Lodge as the *Three Great Lights*."

This most recent statement (of which I have not presumed to alter the grammar) clearly makes nonsense of the oft-repeated claim that "Freemasonry is founded on the Bible."

2. A few, of course, were already in existence. At Oxford the Apollo University Lodge was chartered in 1818, and the earliest Cambridge Lodge dates from 1754.

3. The Rev. J. Fort Newton, *The Builders* (7th edition, 1949) p. 183. I forbear quoting from the even more startlingly frank utterances (continued on foot of page 44)

super-religion, it seems, is not Christianity but Freemasonry.

The higher percentage of intellectuals in the Craft, however, has certainly raised the standards of Masonic scholarship. The early decades of the century indeed were marked by a fresh outcrop of mystical fantasies—the blasphemies of Wilmshurst, the anthropological credulities of J. S. M. Ward sponsored by Sir John Cockburn, the scholastic occultism of A. E. Waite (and among the Theosophical co-Masons not recognized by Grand Lodge, the sheer lunacy of Bishop Leadbeater)—but at the same time the sober scholastic tradition established by Gould, Sadler, Murray-Lyon, and Findel gained ground and flourished. Such historians as Lionel Vibert, G. W. Daynes, J. Heron Lepper, Douglas Knoop, Ivor Grantham, Bernard E. Jones, H. Hiram Hallett, the Rev. Herbert Poole, and Fred L. Pick (to mention a few) have vastly raised the intellectual stature of the Craft, which indeed has never stood higher.

Not one of these Masonic scholars, however, has attempted seriously to tackle Freemasonry on its philosophical and religious aspects, particularly its relationship to Christianity, and hence this field has been left wide open to the ravings of the lunatic fringe. The reason for this is threefold. First, the Masonic scholar is seldom interested in the religious question. Secondly, there is the absolute ban on religious discussion in the Lodge for fear of disturbing the fraternal harmony through controversy. This extends even to the scholarly atmosphere of Research Lodges such as the famous *Quatuor Coronati*, whose published proceedings are a mine of historical information, but show a cautious disinclination to discuss other aspects of the Craft. Thirdly, it seems clear that Masonry and Christianity in its dogmatic and exclusive sense are incompatible if both are taken seriously, hence no Masonic scholar or Christian theologian has dared risk his reputation in either camp by attempting a reconciliation. Either the religious side of Masonry is played down or denied (very difficult in the third degree of the Craft, and quite impossible in the Royal Arch) or Christianity is reduced to mere morality and a sentimental affection for the Sermon on the Mount.

The truly astonishing touchiness and irritability of the Fraternity of *Light Invisible* on the undermining effects of Masonry upon Christianity because the clergyman-mason ("Vindex") who wrote it continues to remain anonymous.

ity when this dilemma is raised by non-Masons, their anxiety to stifle all outside criticism and kill it with silence (extending even to pressure on booksellers and libraries) is in itself a cogent witness not only to the insecurity of their ground, but to their awareness of it.¹ Twice in this century has Freemasonry been criticized from without from the point of view of Christian orthodoxy. In 1926 the Rev. C. Penney Hunt, a Methodist minister, wrote and published *The Menace of Freemasonry to the Christian Faith*, a cogent and stinging criticism which made considerably publicity. "Grand Lodge," the author says in an appendix to the second and subsequent editions, "actually issued a warning to deter men even from printing the book—and exerted pressure on editors not to review and on booksellers not to sell."² What other body (other than totalitarian dictatorships) would dream of stifling criticism by such methods, or even feel the need to do so? The result of the stir, however, was that yet another Christian body was added to the list of those who have formally condemned Masonry on theological grounds. The General Methodist Conference at Bradford in 1927 warned its members against initiation. This has never been repealed, but on the other hand it never became effective.

With the second occasion I am myself, with Dr. H. S. Box,³ more personally concerned, and the events are too recent (indeed still current) to assess, nor is it for me to do so. Through a series of unforeseen chances, however, there has been more publicity in the 1950's than Penney Hunt received in the 1920's and the reactions both public and private have been more violent in the attempt (paradoxically) to maintain the traditional "dignified silence." A preliminary article *Should a Christian be a Freemason?* in the January 1951 edition of *Theology* touched off a storm, which led to Dr. Box and others raising the issue in the Canterbury Convocation. Due largely to the persuasive intervention of the Masonic Bishop of Reading (Dr. A. Groom Parham) this was never debated. Controversy continued in the religious

1. The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, for instance, of which the Archbishop of Canterbury is President, issued a directive to their bookshops that *Darkness Visible* must not be stocked. They have also banned any advertisement of it in their organs, *View Review* and *Theology*.
2. Eighth edition, p. 77.
3. Author of *The Nature of Freemasonry*.

press, however, and a full-scale debate was staged in the Church Assembly in the following June. This body was not in any case competent to deal with the theological issues but lay Masonic support could be relied on ; critics of Masonry were frankly out-manœuvred by the unexpectedness and speed with which Masons themselves with little warning arranged the debate and placed it on a supplementary agenda, and the result was an appeal to sentimentality, to the social and ecclesiastical eminence of Masons, moral irrelevance, even including personal abuse, in which the theological issue was again completely side-stepped. Even a Kelham Father rose to defend the Craft.¹ The motion for an enquiry, moved by a Mason, was overwhelmingly rejected, to the declared delight of the mover. The Assembly was then congratulated by its Masonic Chairman. The *Church Times*,² which drew caustic attention to "the patent manœuvres behind the scenes by which discussion has been stifled in Convocation and side-tracked in the Assembly" declared that "There is sheer lack of logic in saying : 'We have absolutely nothing to fear from an enquiry. Therefore there must on no account be an enquiry.'"

The publication of *Darkness Visible* followed almost exactly a year later. *Reynold's News* and other papers took it up ; the most unexpected publicity, however, came from the *Daily Mirror* who in one of their publish-and-be-damned moods devoted an illustrated feature article to it entitled *Secret Signs of a Million Men* which not only sold out the paper in London by mid-morning, and was the sensation of Fleet Street taverns, but instantly rocketed *Darkness Visible* into a best-seller. Quite unconcerned with the religious issue, with my motives in writing the book, or indeed with anything beyond sensationalism and curiosity, Fleet Street unwittingly re-launched a theological controversy still unresolved and unanswered. Evasiveness, irritation, and irrelevance coupled with the traditional policy of hushing it up is so far the usual Masonic response.³ A bad-

1. Fr. D. H. N. Allenby, S.S.M.
2. June 29, 1951.

3. When, apparently, rumours were current that such a book was about to appear, I received an anonymous phone call to meet an unknown gentleman in the foyer of the Savoy Hotel. I kept the appointment, and was offered £1,000 in banknotes in return for a written undertaking not to publish the book, or any further attacks on Masonry. Who he was I still have not the slightest idea.

tempered anonymous reply, *Light Invisible* was written by an Anglican clergyman with a Unitarian theology, but this strange book freely admits the incompatibility of Masonry with orthodox Christianity.

The existence of the dilemma seems embarrassing both to Grand Lodge and to the Church. The former, obsessed with its respectability and social status, greatly values the ecclesiastical support of Archbishops and Bishops among the clergy who enjoy the rank of Grand Chaplain, just as local Lodges usually welcome the presence of the Vicar. Any withdrawal would be an intolerable and humiliating affront. The Church, on the other hand, dares not offend or provoke thousands of influential and often financially substantial laymen by enquiring into the religious implications of their Freemasonry, even if the mutual solidarity of the episcopate were ever to allow such an enquiry. There is fear on both sides, hence the search for truth is stifled, and the religious bigamy continues. Only Rome can afford to smile at the situation, and continue to win converts.