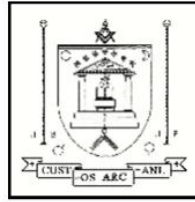




The Co-Freemasonic Order of The Blazing Star



INFORMATION ON THE CO-FREEMASONIC ORDER OF THE BLAZING STAR

1. Freemasonry in General.

Freemasonry is a world-wide fraternity. It is founded upon the principles of Brotherhood, and has no religious, racial or social barriers. As Masons are bound to keep silence with regard to their activities in Lodge, it is natural that misconceptions as to these have often arisen. In view of this, and because Masonic ideals are of a high and altruistic nature, it is desirable to make available to the genuine enquirer such information as may be given. Co-Freemasonry is of the same line of tradition, works the same forms, and is inspired by the same ideals as those of the Grand Lodges and the Supreme Councils in this and many other countries.

Co-Freemasonry, as the name implies, admits to membership women equally with men and it admits them to true, ancient Freemasonry, not to any substitutive or adoptive rites. It is advisable first to consider something of the nature of the Masonic Craft in general, before dealing with Co-Freemasonry in particular.

The Masonic Fraternity is made up of a large number of members living in widely separated parts of the world, and differing considerably in character, education and outlook; and it is encouraging to note among these a growing appreciation of the spiritual interpretation of Masonry. The origin of Masonic tradition is stated by certain authorities, and believed by many individuals, to be attributable to the pure and earlier forms of the Ancient Mystery temples and schools of wisdom of bygone civilizations such as those of Egypt and Greece. These institutions have been regarded by students of ancient history as the fount of all subsequent religious, philosophical, and ethical teachings. Masonry itself is neither a religion, a philosophy, nor a system of ethics and morals. It is a blend of all these. It is one of the forms in which ancient teachings of truth have been transmitted, namely, the allegorical and symbolic form, expressed in ceremonial and in ritual drama. In this manner certain aspects of truth have been preserved and made clear for those who could understand them and profit thereby, while at the same time they have remained safely hidden from the ignorance or the ill-will of those who might misuse them or destroy the records.

While this aspect of the value of allegory and symbolism may be familiar, there is another which may not be so clearly perceived by those to whom such ideas are new. Making due allowance for differing responses to this subject, it may be said that never did so small a thing contain so much as does a symbol. The heart of a whole religion or philosophy, or the basic pattern of a cosmic law, can be conveyed in a minute portion of space and within a moment of time.

A synthesis of many thoughts and emotions conveying a universal principle may thus be given, which, if translated into words, would fill many pages and take many hours to read. And again—in regard to allegory—to witness or to take part in the portrayal of a universal truth put into the form of simple ritual drama, is to receive deeper as well as more lasting impressions of its significance than any teaching or reading could possibly convey. Masonic allegory and symbolism contain the wisdom of eternity, and their study discloses to a Mason just as much as he is able to understand at any one given time, of the inner nature of the universe and of his own being. Therefore its message is different for everyone, each finding for himself that which is the most appropriate interpretation.

The greatest of all Masonic symbols is that of 'The Temple', the Temple of the Universe (or God) containing the lesser Temple of the World (or Humanity) and again, the third and still smaller Temple of every human being. Each of these Temples is a reflection in miniature of the one above, and in this concept a Mason may realize how truly he and his world are built in the image of God. 'Know ye not that ye are the Temple of God?' This example gives an indication of the vast field of exploration and contemplation which exists for the Mason, and which can reveal to him some of the wonder of the Universe and of his own nature.

The practice of true brotherliness is the greatest and strongest ideal and precept in Freemasonry. If this is not the basis of all thought and activity, in and out of Lodge, no study or contemplation of symbol or enactment of ritual is of any value. Charity has always been one of the chief Masonic virtues, and a Mason is enjoined to practice it in thought, word and deed.

Of paramount importance also is the maintenance of silence with regard to Masonic secrets. This is not in order to foster a sense of superiority or to arouse curiosity. Since ancient times, appreciation of silence has always been considered a necessity in the seeker for wisdom. Unfortunately, its value today is sadly under-rated. Quite apart from the guarding of truth from age to age, a Mason must learn to keep his own counsel as well as to preserve the confidences of a Brother.

Appreciation of Masonry may to a certain extent depend upon individual type and temperament, as well as upon open-mindedness and the willingness to learn. Since these differ in humanity as widely as do both taste and appearance, it is obvious how varied must be the response to Masonry. To the altruistic and earnest seeker after Wisdom, there is not only valuable practical training and counsel if needed, but also enlightenment leading to inspiration of a high order. Between the extremes of approach there lies a wide field of experience, together with constant opportunity to become a 'good Mason' and consequently a most valuable member of any other community to which the Brother may happen to belong.

After a period of intense darkness and suffering whether in the world at large, or within his individual self, Man needs every possible aid for spiritual and moral recovery. It is therefore especially at such a time that Masonry, with its spiritual foundation and its precepts of practical brotherhood, has so much to offer.

2. Co-Freemasonry, Its Aims and Ideals.

General principles:

The aim of Co-Freemasonry is to seek Truth, through Masonic Symbolism and Tradition, along the immemorial path of the Mysteries. To secure freedom in this search, the widest tolerance is enjoined by all its members.

The Order sympathizes warmly with all sincere efforts for diffusing the light of Wisdom, as well as with work for human welfare and the lessening of ignorance and misery. Individuals are encouraged to pursue these with zeal, but the Order cannot associate itself, as a body, with any particular Movement.

By the close association of outward activity and altruism with the search for the Inner Light, the Order seeks to train its members to a fuller realization of the Divine purpose in the world and of the part all should fit themselves to play in the forward movement of world reconstruction.

Stress is laid primarily upon the following fundamental considerations:

1. The spiritual significance of Masonry, and the application of its teachings to life.
2. The spirit of understanding as well as tolerance in all differences of opinion.
3. The need for dignity, beauty, and efficiency, in all ceremonial work; the importance of individual training therein, and the influence of this on the building of character and facility.
4. The constant practice of Masonic ideals, out of the Lodge as well as within it.

The work of Co-Freemasons:

Co-Freemasons seek to contribute to the building of a new world. As the operative mason uses tools to shape a stone for its proper use in a building, so does the speculative mason use tools symbolically to shape his own character for the benefit of the world in which he lives. Members are encouraged to study the meaning of Masonic allegory and symbolism, and are trained in the correct and intelligent performance of ceremonial, directed by right thought strengthened by feeling, and carried out in appropriate action.

One of the first things to be realized is that all Masonic training and all advancement through the various degrees, are for the purpose of fitting the Brother to become a useful 'stone' in that great building which is the Temple of Humanity, a Temple in which each individual has his own unique contribution to make, and his own special niche which he must shape himself. Three important prerequisites for a Freemason are: selflessness, balance and common sense, and his training is such that it helps him to acquire or to increase these qualities.

Secondly, there is the realization of the power engendered, through corporate unity of intent and action, in a Masonic Lodge. A Brother becomes aware of the fact that a body of Masons, gathered together regularly at the same time and place in a truly dedicated spirit, and conducting a meeting with that efficiency required of all Masonic work (either operative or symbolic) , creates a strong atmosphere highly charged with aspiration and positive goodwill.

Such activity must inevitably be a force for good in any neighbourhood and when occurring in many places and repeated at regular intervals, it can build up a network of powerful thought which is bound to affect all those who come within its radiations.

Although such knowledge of the working of thought is at present limited, its power for either good or ill is accepted by many people to-day. Thus Masonry, seriously enacted in ritual and ceremony, and its precepts practiced by the individual in daily life, will surely commend itself to those who make enquiries as to its nature. Its influence is needed today in greater measure than ever before in the history of mankind.

The path of Masonry is one which should appeal especially to those who are attracted to the dignified and beautiful expression of great concepts through ceremony and ritual drama. Several versions of the ritual are in use among the various Masonic Orders, though all are based on the traditional forms known to all Freemasons, and in standard use in the Grand Lodges of England or Scotland. But while some Lodges keep to this standard form itself, others are permitted to use rituals to which have been added the use of music, of incense, and other accessories to the main purpose, as well as some further exemplification and explanation of the symbolism and teaching.

3. Some Practical Information.

Membership and meetings:

Membership of a Lodge, and therefore of the Order as a whole, should be a matter of great importance in the life of a Mason. He may be, and usually is, an active and busy person. But his sense of the significance of membership, and of responsibility towards the Lodge, should be a strong and living reality in everyday life. The particular Lodge in which a candidate is admitted is known as his 'Mother Lodge'.

The Co-Freemasonic Order of The Blazing Star comprises and works a series of degrees, from the first to the thirty-third, known as the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite. In this series, the first of the four main divisions or groupings of degrees is known as Craft Masonry. This comprises three degrees and later on for some, a chair degree. While a candidate is not encouraged to hurry in the attaining of the two degrees which follow his initiation, he is given instruction, and opportunity to progress when ready to do so.

The meetings of most Lodges are monthly, and members are expected to attend regularly, unless sickness or some other personal emergency should make it impossible. The usual time for meetings is the evening.

Although ceremonies for entry of candidates, and of their subsequent advancement, form a considerable part of Lodge activity, this by no means comprises all of it. There are meetings for instruction and practice in Masonic ritual, as well as those devoted to study of Masonic symbolism, practice, spirituality and the like.

After meetings, members are invited to contribute vegetarian food to a festive board, which is a shared buffet. Socializing is not a part of this particular order but a shared buffet after meetings does give members time to discuss thoughts and ideas on Masonic work and practice in an atmosphere of safety and tolerance.

4. Origin and History.

The chief sources to which writers have attributed the origin of Freemasonry are as follows: The Ancient Mysteries, the Jewish religion, the Roman Colleges of Architects, the Knights Templar and other chivalric orders, the Operative Masons of the Middle Ages, and the Rosicrucians, while those who base their arguments upon certain documents go no further back than Desaguliers and his associates in the year 1717. Unless one holds rigidly to the last-named theory, it is not difficult to suppose that any of the above groups have influenced the growth of Masonry.

In regard to the actual origin, that is a question which every enquirer, and indeed every Mason, may attempt to answer for himself. That which now follows is a brief sketch and a general idea of the trend of Masonic development. For some readers it may begin too early in time to be credible. However, it comprises views held by many students of antiquity and history, and through it the reader may be led to his own special line of investigation.

It is stated in the first section that the Masonic source of origin was considered by many to have been the temples and schools of the Ancient Mysteries. This statement must now be somewhat amplified for those to whom the idea may be new. Before the Mysteries had fallen into disrepute, their ceremonies, some of which marked the seasonal festivals of the year, were exceptional occasions of dignity, power, and beauty, and were presided over by Initiate Priests, who at times were also the rulers of the land, men and women who had considerable knowledge of the power of ceremonial magic. But more important still was the fact that they were people of sufficient purity and integrity to wield that power wisely. It was in fact the decline of these moral qualities which later brought the Mystery institutions into a low state of decadence.

In the ceremonial of these ancient times were enacted allegorical representations of birth and growth, of transmutation of the soul, of resurrection and of the life after death. But that which is of the utmost significance is the fact that they reflected (as do our ceremonies today) man's own inner progress along the Path of spiritual unfoldment. It is not unthinkable that in the times of unsullied activity in the Mysteries, the spiritual development of the Candidate along the Path of Initiation was greatly stimulated through the power of these ceremonies. In all likelihood he was helped to his own next inner stage, as well as to the outer grade of his Mystery Temple and it is no exaggeration to say that something of that spirit persists today whenever and wherever Masonry is seriously performed with integrity and sincerity.

Nature worship reached a high level of expression in those early times, culminating in the worship of the Solar Spirit as well as of the great Planetary Rulers. Man had reverence for all that lived, and some understanding of his own relative position within the vast scheme of life.

To this was added a studiously acquired knowledge of how to purify his nature and control his powers. For in those days man possessed powers of seeing and knowing which he is now only just beginning to rediscover at a higher level.

All these things were taught in the Mystery schools, and such legacies as the Egyptian 'Book of the Dead', and the known teachings of Greek philosophers such as Plato and Pythagoras to say nothing of the findings of students of Comparative Religion, all bear witness to the fact of such instruction having been given.

In some form or other they have persisted, and we find them reborn in Masonry, and in the various spiritually minded groups which exist today throughout the world.

We will now briefly follow this golden thread of wisdom as it leaves the ancient classical world, and note its appearance in the religion of Judaism. It is to this era that the building tradition in Masonry looks for its inception, with the Temple of King Solomon as one of its great symbols and basic plans of teaching. So deeply ingrained did this influence become, that it has permeated Craft Masonry right down to the present time.

A long time after the Jewish development, we come to the later Roman age, the period of the fall of the Empire and with it the disruption of all but one college among a certain group named the Roman Colleges of Architects. This sole survivor established itself upon an island in Lake Como, which to this day is known as 'Isola Comacina'. A Lombard King granted its members a Charter giving exclusive rights of building. The Romanesque style of Architecture arose out of their work, and it is thought that the members of this island college were the direct fore-runners of the Medieval Freemasons.

As to the Medieval Freemasons themselves, and their Operative Lodges, much has been written for all to read. It is sufficient to say that modern Speculative Masonry bears many traces of the influence of these Operatives.

Mention must also be made of the influence of the chivalric orders of knighthood, among which were the Knights Templar and the Knights of Malta. All these are considered as being instrumental in preserving and handing down some kind of secret tradition which later affected the development of Masonry.

The Elizabethan Era cannot be passed over without suggesting that it deeply coloured Freemasonry. It was an age of Secret Societies, and a time when great minds were moulding the world of philosophy, literature, and drama. Spenser, Marlowe, Sidney, Bacon, Donne, and Dee are just a few of their names. They hid their deeper knowledge in essay, verse and play, in which were interspersed cryptic sayings and it is claimed by some, cyphers. They all left their mark upon the English language. Also Shakespeare's Plays whoever may have written them, contain too many obvious, as well as concealed, Masonic references for them all to be attributable to chance. Was this, in fact, the formative period for that which subsequently emerged into light in 1717?

About the same time we hear also of a mysterious body called the Rosicrucians, with their head, Christian Rosenkreutz, around whose either real or problematical existence, tales of mystery have been wrapped. They too have left their mark upon Masonry; their own emblem, the Rose and Cross, being one of the most mystical and beautiful of all Masonic symbols.

We pass on to the time of the French Revolution, and hear of a figure known at that time in Europe as the Comte de Saint Germain. Certain lines of tradition associate him with spiritual help and guidance in former times as well as with the France of Marie Antoinette. Several accounts point to his having been connected with Masonry at that time as well as with other secret and learned societies.

We have now arrived very near to our own times, and in regard to the beginnings of Freemasonry as it is known today, there are certain important dates which it is interesting to note. They are:

1646 First record of a Masonic initiation in England.

1717 Foundation of Grand Lodge in London.

1725 A Grand Lodge formed in Ireland.

1728 First Lodge formed abroad, in France.

1730 First Lodge in America.

1736 Foundation of Grand Lodge of Scotland.

1744 Foundation of Lodge in Berlin.

1813 Re-formation of Grand Lodge in London after a period of vicissitudes and divisions, as United Grand Lodge of England.

The first step towards the founding of Co-Freemasonry was taken in 1882. A Lodge named 'Les Libres Penseurs,' under 'La Grande Loge Symbolique Ecosaise de France,' believing that women should be admitted equally with men, and desiring to bestow high honour upon one whose work for humanity in the field of social service had been outstanding, initiated Madam Maria Deraismes. This led to the founding in 1893 of 'L'Ordre Maconnique Mixte,' at first as a Grand Lodge, and later, in 1900, under a Supreme Council of the 33rd degree, in all of which the assistance of high grade Masons in France has to be acknowledged, especially that of Dr. Georges Martin, a fellow with Madam Deraismes in 'Les Libres Penseurs'.

In 1902, Dr. Annie Besant, then unaware of the existence of a Masonic body admitting both men and women, but nevertheless feeling an insistent urge to enter Freemasonry, spoke of this desire to 'Miss Francesca Arundale. It so happened that this lady was herself a member of the Order, and this strange seeming coincidence led to the admission of Dr. Besant and to the subsequent founding in 1902 of Co-Freemasonry in Britain, and to the carrying of the Order to many parts of the world.

In November 1997 a group of senior masons formed an independent Supreme Council to revitalize and regenerate Masonic ritual and practice with an explicit emphasis on the symbolic, esoteric and spiritual teachings, initiatory training, and the 'inner' workings forming the basis of the ritual work. To distinguish the new order from other Masonic bodies, the name 'Order of the Blazing Star' was taken. The Blazing Star is a universal symbol, and is found in most Masonic

rituals. The principals, rituals and traditions are still based on those of the Grand Scottish Constitutions of 1786, revised and agreed by the national Supreme Councils of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite at Lausanne in 1876.

The Order of International Co-Freemasonry developed some of the rituals. The Order of the Blazing Star has also refined some of the rituals, as well as maintaining an ancient Irish working in the craft degrees, and works them under 9 progressive but complete grades under one umbrella. It therefore encompasses all the regular Masonic ceremonies to the 33 degree. In addition 'side grades' are also important for more advanced students.

In May 2007 the Supreme Council decided the name of the order should more closely reflect its heritage and work and thus 'The Co-Freemasonic Order of the Blazing Star' was established.

One cannot help but observe how all through the passage of time the heart of Masonic teaching has been preserved and the course of its development directed. By whom? Directing and preserving agencies? Most certainly! But agencies must have a guiding hand, and the Great Architect certainly guides His great Master Builders and His Draughts men; one day we may be able to recognize some of them. Till then, let us follow His design as best we may.