

PENETRATING SOME PUZZLES OF PRICHARD

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In the year 1730 there appeared for sale on the streets of London a pamphlet entitled, "The History or Masonry or Masonry Dissected, to which are added the Mason Word and Catechism". The author was a certain "Samuel Prichard, member of a Constituted Lodge." It is generally acknowledged to be the first, and hence perhaps reckoned the most famous, or infamous, of what are called 'Masonic Exposures'. Most of you, perhaps all of you are familiar with these facts but how many, I wonder, are acquainted with the pamphlet's contents? Not many, I dare to guess, and even if you are one of those who has bothered to look into its pages have you answers to the several puzzles that its contents pose for any brother who takes a more than casual interest in the Craft to which he belongs? It is to supply that want as well as to arouse your interest in another field of Masonic thought that I offer you what follows. In such time as is available today I cannot of course hope to deal in detail with ALL the puzzling aspects of this work but perhaps some revelations will stimulate you to unravel the rest.

With the intention of at least covering the main parts of this "Exposure" I shall here deal with 8 items, two from the introduction which Prichard calls "The Origin of Masonry" and then two from each of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd degrees. So let us begin.

In a significant opening sentence Prichard tells us "that the original institution of Masonry is laid on the foundation of the liberal arts and sciences" of which the 5th, Geometry, was especially important. The art and mystery of Masonry, he says, is first located at the erection of the Tower of Babel and continued by Euclid in Egypt. We are then introduced "to an excellent and curious mason, that was the chief under Grand Master Hiram, whose name was Mannon Grecus, who taught the true art of masonry to Carolus Marcel in France."

It is sentences such as this latter one, apparently ignoring the usual passage of time and space, which have led generations of Masons to regard the traditional history of the Craft as too ridiculous to merit attention and thence to their total neglect of it. That attitude, I suggest, is mistaken for with due research into this particular aspect of Freemasonry, what, as in this excerpt, looks like a puzzle, if not a downright misstatement of history proves to be an exact record of what took place. For the facts are these.

In the year 765 a renowned teacher of the liberal arts and sciences in York called Alcuin was commissioned by the Archbishop of York to oversee the building of a new church in that city along with another priest, Eanbald. He was, by this commission recognised as a Chief Master of building work such as those 'under Hiram Abi' were expected to undertake. For anyone who is interested you should know that there is a poem written by this scholar/architect that describes his task.

In the years that followed Alcuin was finally persuaded to move to Aachen in northern France to serve the Holy Roman Emperor, Carolus Magnus, as not only the head of a new courtly school there but also to advise the Emperor on the building of his new Chapel, hence the other name of the place, Aix-la-Chapelle. What you should know is that in one of his letters to the Emperor Alcuin describes this new place of worship as being another "Temple of Solomon". Moreover, in an allegorical passage referring to the chief members of the court of Charlemagne, Alcuin is referred to by the name of either Flaccus or Mannon Graecus. What Prichard wrote was, therefore, no nonsense at all though we could say that it may perhaps have been fact which was not fully understood - as by many Freemasons since.

For our second puzzle we turn to the next page of the work and this statement:

"The terms of free and accepted Masonry (as now it is) has never been heard of till within these few years: no constituted lodges or quarterly communications were heard of till 1691, when lords and dukes, lawyers and shopkeepers, and other inferior trades (many porters not excepted) were admitted to the mystery, or no mystery."

Now isn't this interesting? For those still brought up to believe that English Freemasonry really began in 1717, and that it was then that constituted lodges and quarterly communications began, these words of Prichard must sound very odd indeed. Prichard's account was reproduced in a 1738 French translation entitled "La Reception Mysterieuse", based on the known working of the London Grand Lodge of the day. This new version of Prichard, however, adds the words:

"..the Society became composed of all conditions of people, the Nobility & People of Quality..excluding nobody; distinguishing them into three Classes, and not forgetting to admit Doctors, to take care of the health of the Brethren."

What may interest Cheshire brethren particularly is that when the old private, ex-Guild, lodge in Chester became over-large the Duke of Richmond, as a G.M., was asked in the 1720s what they should do about it. His answer, only re-discovered recently, was that they should split the old lodge into three, each of the new lodges being composed of a different social class. What this French exposure describes was current Masonic thinking.

Granted, then, that Prichard is not just making this up why is the date 1691 chosen? Harry Carr, in his edited version of the French exposure, writes, "This year saw the establishment of the Freemasons as a secret society. The title of Freemason seems to have been chosen to make it seem that the Members had to build a new political structure, disapproving the last revolution which had taken place a few years before."

If these words were meant to clarify the puzzle of the date then they do not succeed because they raise two more questions. Why was it necessary to make the Freemasons into a secret society at that point when that was what they already seemed to have been, according to Dr.Plot's description in his History of Staffordshire in 1678?

Secondly, how are we to interpret the Masons' stance in regard to the recent 1688 Revolution when William and Mary replaced James II? In what way did the Freemasons disapprove of the recent Revolution? Were they seen as Non-Jurors or Jacobites supporting the Stuart line, and for that reason had to become secret? If that is so then how is Prichard able to state that their numbers and breadth of membership OPENLY increased? I believe that there must be some other explanation. There is. In Vol.109 of the Q.C. Transactions.

Williamson and Baigent contributed a short article that seems to prove conclusively that another reference to 1691 by the historian John Aubrey was correct. This stated that "this day (May 1691 the 18th being monday after Rogation Sunday) is a great convention at St. Paul's-Church (sic) of the Fraternity of the Accepted-Masons where Sr. Christopher Wren is to be adopted a Brother: and Sir Henry Goodric...of ye Tower, and divers others". Confirmation of this statement rests on the close friendship of Aubrey and Wren, the fact that they were both members of the Royal Society and this item was found in that body's archives. Further, this item was recorded by the Clerk to that Society some time after the event described so had it not been true it would surely have been amended.

The puzzle is not over, however, for if we accept what is written in the informative "The Complete Freemason" or "Multis Paucis for Lovers of Secrets" of the 1760s we learn that Sir Christopher was a G.W. in 1661, Dep.G.M. in 1666 (with Grinlin Gibbons, no less, as a G.W.) and it was in this capacity that Charles II requested Wren to design a new City of London. In 1685 Wren is described as re-elected G.M. and was still such in 1689. How then, you may well ask, could this very prestigious mason be 'adopted a Brother' in 1691? The only answer has to be because this is the point at which the most important architect/stonemason in England recognizes, and is received into, the 'Accepted and Free Masonry' which by now was clearly identified as separate from, and other than, the trade stonemasonry with which in its Guild form it had been linked.1691 was in this sense a real landmark year for London Freemasons and it is not surprising that Prichard records it as an important new starting date. What he does not record is that by 1711 Sir Christopher forsakes the Accepted Masons and there is need for a new Grand Master. The scene is prepared for the events of 1717.

In Prichard's exposure of the First Degree there seems to be no distinction between being a ruler of an Accepted Masonic lodge and the status of a Master Mason. Since we know that no ruler of a new lodge at this time could be installed unless with the permission or representation of the Grand Lodge does this begin to explain why in the beginning the degree of a Master Mason was restricted to Grand Lodge members and not revealed, and then only in a restricted form in 1726? Initially, in order to be a Free and Accepted MASTER MASON you either were, or had been, a ruler of a Lodge. That is why Anthony Sayer, bookseller, was chosen.

Turning to our next puzzle, Prichard's exposure of the First Degree describes how the words for the First and the Second degree are revealed in a catechismal exchange. Now why do we have both words revealed in the E.A.Degree? The answer is that in a Guild lodge there was only one form of Freemasonry and that was of the Fellows. In that ceremony both the words were revealed. When eventually new Guilds were re-

chartered by the working building crafts the previously attached lodges became separate and private bodies and people who were NOT Freemen of the local city or borough could now join. As such candidates might not have been Apprentices in a trade this step was now required, but as part of the Fellows degree. This, indeed, is how it remained in the Grand Lodge of All England at York throughout the 18th century. In London the degree became a separate one but Prichard shows us that by 1730 the two words were still communicated in one degree as they were previously. Even the opening of the Lodge by the Fellows was now applied to the Apprentice degree, but that is yet another story.

Coming to the 2nd Degree workings, we read how the person who asked the questions, or did the examining, in the kind of lodge that Prichard knew, was the Right Worshipful Master or his deputy. This is because from the 17th to the end of the 18th century, the ceremonial was comparatively brief, after which the candidate sat at the lodge table and the R.W.M. or a Past Master put the questions and the members around the table gave the answers in turn. That is why a pamphlet like Prichard's is completely taken up with this Q. & A. form. Prichard is again accurately recording what was real fact in both the style and the content of Masonic practice in his day.

At the close of the Fellowcraft degree the Responder says: "God's greeting to this our happy meeting and all the Right Worshipful Brothers and Fellows", to which the Examiner adds: "Of the Right Worshipful and Holy Lodge of St. John". A note is then appended: "The reason why they denominated themselves of the Lodge of St. John is because he was the forerunner of our Saviour and laid the first parallel line of the Gospel."

Can we really be hearing this when Bros. Anderson and Desaguliers are supposed to have begun the de-Christianizing of the Craft with a reference to "that religion in which all men agree"? What I believe Prichard is again proving is that his revelation of what Freemasons said and did was truer than we might have imagined. How else can we explain why even as late as 1802 John Browne in his Moderns ritual called "Master Key" has a passage like this: "A true Christian Faith is the substance of things hoped for the evidence of things not seen (that will) bring us to those blessed Mansions where we shall be eternally happy with God, the grand Architect of the Universe, whose Son died for us, and rose again, that we might be justified through Faith in his most precious Blood"? What Prichard was stating was not a brief aberration but a lasting tradition that only the Duke of Sussex would substantially, but not completely, alter.

Which nicely brings us to the Master Mason degree in its London infancy. Time prevents us considering exactly what was meant by "If a M.M. you would be you must understand the rule of three" but we cannot evade the lines that follow:

"And shall make you free.
And what you want in Masonry
Shall in this lodge be shown to thee."

Here one of the words with which we are familiar is the Password that gives the candidate 'free passage' into the degree and what is still wanting will now be revealed. It is at this point in the French edition that Harry Carr adds another comment: "This obvious contradiction is made here deliberately as in other places" (p.30 of 'Early French Exposures'). He has every reason to speak of a contradiction because when the candidate in Prichard's exposure is later asked for the word of the 'master' he again gives ".....", meaning the "builder is smitten". What is interesting, however, is that in the French version we are told (p.33) that this word is that of a Master CRAFTSMAN. You can now see how puzzling this is.

The solution, I believe, is given in two other French exposures, the first dated 1744 (Le Parfait Macon p.195) and the second, Le Macon Demasque of 1751. These not only show that in ceremonies based on the forms used by MODERNS lodges there was the tradition of an earlier true Master Word, but that was what was to be found. The Scots Masters were those determined to preserve it. Our final puzzle confirms what has just been uncovered.

So we turn to the last part of the 3rd degree history according to Prichard. Bearing in mind, of course, that the Temple of Solomon was oriented exactly in the opposite way to our lodge room, here, we are told that the Grand Master Hiram was carried to his last resting place through the entrance of the S.S. in the West and then buried where the Ark of the Covenant was due to stand. Even though this event was supposed to have taken place BEFORE the Holy Temple was completed what is here inferred is very significant. A devout Jewish Mason, when this ritual was pointed out to him, reacted with natural disbelief. He holds, as our present ritual states, that nothing common or unclean could be buried there. Or did the words recorded by Prichard mean that before the consecration of the S.S. by Solomon this honoured Grand Master was buried

BENEATH it in a vault that might later be discovered? What we do know is that the same reporting of events persists in those other French exposures of Moderns' type working for at least the next 30 years. One remarkably describes how the tomb was marked with the former word of a Master, which is also the name of God in Hebrew. That holy name is still pronounced as ADONAI by Jews today.

This is remarkable because it continues the notion, not only of burying a Grand Master in this most holy place, but of marking his coffin with the name of the Deity. Dutch 3rd degree working continues this latter practice, derived from France, to this day, though it is never so explained to M.M.s there.

What can all this mean? I believe it means that we have here the traces of much older Masonry in which the lost word is, as the banner of the Guild stonemasons always showed, the name of God himself, whilst the original Master Architect Mason was none other than an equally divine person, His Son. Is it not intriguing that at the end of Prichard's 2nd degree there are the words: "Others assert that Our Saviour himself was accepted a free Mason while he was in the flesh, but how ridiculous and profane it seems, I leave to judicious readers to consider". Was Prichard again accurately recording the much older tradition that is still retained in the Royal Order ritual? What is true is that if we accept this premise all past ritual puzzles disappear.

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