JOSEPH FORT NEWTON

THE BUILDERS

HISTORY OF FREEMASONS

Joseph Fort Newton

The Builders: History of Freemasons

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THE ANTEROOM

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Fourteen years ago the writer of this volume entered the temple of Freemasonry, and that date stands out in memory as one of the most significant days in his life. There was a little spread on the night of his raising, and, as is the custom, the candidate was asked to give his impressions of the Order. Among other things, he made request to know if there was any little book which would tell a young man the things he would most like to know about Masonry—what it was, whence it came, what it teaches, and what it is trying to do in the world? No one knew of such a book at that time, nor has any been found to meet a need which many must have felt before and since. By an odd coincidence, it has fallen to the lot of the author to write the little book for which he made request fourteen years ago.

This bit of reminiscence explains the purpose of the present volume, and every book must be judged by its spirit and purpose, not less than by its style and contents. Written as a commission from the Grand Lodge of Iowa, and approved by that Grand body, a copy of this book is to be presented to every man upon whom the degree of Master Mason is conferred within this Grand Jurisdiction. Naturally this intention has determined the method and arrangement of the book, as well as the matter it contains; its aim being to tell a young man entering the order the antecedents of Masonry, its development, its philosophy, its mission, and its ideal. Keeping this purpose always in mind, the effort has been to prepare a brief, simple, and vivid account of the origin, growth, and teaching of the Order, so written as to

provoke a deeper interest in and a more earnest study of its story and its service to mankind.

No work of this kind has been undertaken, so far as is known, by any Grand Lodge in this country or abroad—at least, not since the old *Pocket Companion*, and other such works in the earlier times; and this is the more strange from the fact that the need of it is so obvious, and its possibilities so fruitful and important. Every one who has looked into the vast literature of Masonry must often have felt the need of a concise, compact, yet comprehensive survey to clear the path and light the way. Especially must those feel such a need who are not accustomed to traverse long and involved periods of history, and more especially those who have neither the time nor the opportunity to sift ponderous volumes to find out the facts. Much of our literature—indeed, by far the larger part of it—was written before the methods of scientific study had arrived, and while it fascinates, it does not convince those who are used to the more critical habits of research. Consequently, without knowing it, some of our most earnest Masonic writers have made the Order a target for ridicule by their extravagant claims as to its antiquity. They did not make it clear in what sense it is ancient, and not a little satire has been aimed at Masons for their gullibility in accepting as true the wildest and most absurd legends. Besides, no history of Masonry has been written in recent years, and some important material has come to light in the world of historical and archæological scholarship, making not a little that has hitherto been obscure more clear; and there is need that this new knowledge be related to what was already known. While modern research aims at accuracy, too often its results are dry pages of fact, devoid of literary beauty and spiritual appeal—a skeleton without the warm robe of flesh

and blood. Striving for accuracy, the writer has sought to avoid making a dusty chronicle of facts and figures, which few would have the heart to follow, with what success the reader must decide.

Such a book is not easy to write, and for two reasons: it is the history of a secret Order, much of whose lore is not to be written, and it covers a bewildering stretch of time, asking that the contents of innumerable volumes—many of them huge, disjointed, and difficult to digest—be compact within a small space. Nevertheless, if it has required a prodigious labor, it is assuredly worth while in behalf of the young men who throng our temple gates, as well as for those who are to come after us. Every line of this book has been written in the conviction that the real history of Masonry is great enough, and its simple teaching grand enough, without the embellishment of legend, much less of occultism. It proceeds from first to last upon the assurance that all that we need to do is to remove the scaffolding from the historic temple of Masonry and let it stand out in the sunlight, where all men can see its beauty and symmetry, and that it will command the respect of the most critical and searching intellects, as well as the homage of all who love mankind. By this faith the long study has been guided; in this confidence it has been completed.

To this end the sources of Masonic scholarship, stored in the library of the Grand Lodge of Iowa, have been explored, and the highest authorities have been cited wherever there is uncertainty—copious references serving not only to substantiate the statements made, but also, it is hoped, to guide the reader into further and more detailed research. Also, in respect of issues still open to debate and about which differences of opinion obtain, both sides have been given a hearing, so far as space would allow, that the

student may weigh and decide the question for himself. Like all Masonic students of recent times, the writer is richly indebted to the great Research Lodges of England—especially to the Quatuor Coronati Lodge, No. 2076—without whose proceedings this study would have been much harder to write, if indeed it could have been written at all. Such men as Gould, Hughan, Speth, Crawley, Thorp, to name but a few—not forgetting Pike, Parvin, Mackey, Fort, and others in this country—deserve the perpetual gratitude of the fraternity. If, at times, in seeking to escape from mere legend, some of them seemed to go too far toward another extreme—forgetting that there is much in Masonry that cannot be traced by name and date—it was but natural in their effort in behalf of authentic history and accurate scholarship. Alas, most of those named belong now to a time that is gone and to the people who are no longer with us here, but they are recalled by an humble student who would pay them the honor belonging to great men and great Masons.

This book is divided into three parts, as everything Masonic should be: Prophecy, History, and Interpretation. The first part has to do with the hints and foregleams of Masonry in the early history, tradition, mythology, and symbolism of the race—finding its foundations in the nature and need of man, and showing how the stones wrought out by time and struggle were brought from afar to the making of Masonry as we know it. The second part is a story of the order of builders through the centuries, from the building of the Temple of Solomon to the organization of the mother Grand Lodge of England, and the spread of the Order all over the civilized world. The third part is a statement and exposition of the faith of Masonry, its philosophy, its religious meaning, its genius, and its ministry to the

individual, and through the individual to society and the state. Such is a bare outline of the purpose, method, plan, and spirit of the work, and if these be kept in mind it is believed that it will tell its story and confide its message.

When a man thinks of our mortal lot—its greatness and its pathos, how much has been wrought out in the past, and how binding is our obligation to preserve and enrich the inheritance of humanity—there comes over him a strange warming of the heart toward all his fellow workers; and especially toward the young, to whom we must soon entrust all that we hold sacred. All through these pages the wish has been to make the young Mason feel in what a great and benign tradition he stands, that he may the more earnestly strive to be a Mason not merely in form, but in faith, in spirit, and still more, in character; and so help to realize somewhat of the beauty we all have dreamed—lifting into the light the latent powers and unguessed possibilities of this the greatest order of men upon the earth. Everyone can do a little, and if each does his part faithfully the sum of our labors will be very great, and we shall leave the world fairer than we found it, richer in faith, gentler in justice, wiser in pity—for we pass this way but once, pilgrims seeking a country, even a City that hath foundations.

J.F.N.

Cedar Rapids, Iowa, September 7, 1914.

PART I—PROPHECY

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THE FOUNDATIONS

By Symbols is man guided and commanded, made happy, made wretched. He everywhere finds himself encompassed with Symbols, recognized as such or not recognized: the Universe is but one vast Symbol of God; nay, if thou wilt have it, what is man himself but a Symbol of God; is not all that he does symbolical; a revelation to Sense of the mystic God-given force that is in him; a Gospel of Freedom, which he, the Messiah of Nature, preaches, as he can, by word and act? Not a Hut he builds but is the visible embodiment of a Thought; but bears visible record of invisible things; but is, in the transcendental sense, symbolical as well as real.

—Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*

CHAPTER I
THE FOUNDATIONS

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Two arts have altered the face of the earth and given shape to the life and thought of man, Agriculture and Architecture. Of the two, it would be hard to know which has been the more intimately interwoven with the inner life of humanity; for man is not only a planter and a builder, but a mystic and a thinker. For such a being, especially in primitive times, any work was something more than itself; it was a truth found out. In becoming useful it attained some form, enshrining at once a thought and a mystery. Our present study has to do with the second of these arts, which has been called the matrix of civilization.

When we inquire into origins and seek the initial force which carried art forward, we find two fundamental factors—physical necessity and spiritual aspiration. Of course, the first great impulse of all architecture was need, honest response to the demand for shelter; but this demand included a Home for the Soul, not less than a roof over the head. Even in this response to primary need there was something spiritual which carried it beyond provision for the body; as the men of Egypt, for instance, wanted an indestructible resting-place, and so built the pyramids. As Capart says, prehistoric art shows that this utilitarian purpose was in almost every case blended with a religious, or at least a magical, purpose.[1] The spiritual instinct, in seeking to recreate types and to set up more sympathetic relations with the universe, led to imitation, to ideas of

proportion, to the passion for beauty, and to the effort after perfection.

Man has been always a builder, and nowhere has he shown himself more significantly than in the buildings he has erected. When we stand before them—whether it be a mud hut, the house of a cliff-dweller stuck like the nest of a swallow on the side of a cañon, a Pyramid, a Parthenon, or a Pantheon—we seem to read into his soul. The builder may have gone, perhaps ages before, but here he has left something of himself, his hopes, his fears, his ideas, his dreams. Even in the remote recesses of the Andes, amidst the riot of nature, and where man is now a mere savage, we come upon the remains of vast, vanished civilizations, where art and science and religion reached unknown heights. Wherever humanity has lived and wrought, we find the crumbling ruins of towers, temples, and tombs, monuments of its industry and its aspiration. Also, whatever else man may have been—cruel, tyrannous, vindictive—his buildings always have reference to religion. They bespeak a vivid sense of the Unseen and his awareness of his relation to it. Of a truth, the story of the Tower of Babel is more than a myth. Man has ever been trying to build to heaven, embodying his prayer and his dream in brick and stone.

For there are two sets of realities—material and spiritual—but they are so interwoven that all practical laws are exponents of moral laws. Such is the thesis which Ruskin expounds with so much insight and eloquence in his *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, in which he argues that the laws of architecture are moral laws, as applicable to the building of character as to the construction of cathedrals. He finds those laws to be Sacrifice, Truth, Power, Beauty, Life, Memory, and, as the crowning grace of all, that principle to which Polity owes its stability, Life its happiness, Faith its

acceptance, and Creation its continuance—*Obedience*. He holds that there is no such thing as liberty, and never can be. The stars have it not; the earth has it not; the sea has it not. Man fancies that he has freedom, but if he would use the word Loyalty instead of Liberty, he would be nearer the truth, since it is by obedience to the laws of life and truth and beauty that he attains to what he calls liberty.

Throughout that brilliant essay, Ruskin shows how the violation of moral laws spoils the beauty of architecture, mars its usefulness, and makes it unstable. He points out, with all the variations of emphasis, illustration, and appeal, that beauty is what is imitated from natural forms, consciously or unconsciously, and that what is not so derived, but depends for its dignity upon arrangement received from the human mind, expresses, while it reveals, the quality of the mind, whether it be noble or ignoble. Thus:

All building, therefore, shows man either as gathering or governing; and the secrets of his success are his knowing what to gather, and how to rule. These are the two great intellectual Lamps of Architecture; the one consisting in a just and humble veneration of the works of God upon earth, and the other in an understanding of the dominion over those works which has been vested in man.[2]

What our great prophet of art thus elaborated so eloquently, the early men forefelt by instinct, dimly it may be, but not less truly. If architecture was born of need it soon showed its magic quality, and all true building touched depths of feeling and opened gates of wonder. No doubt the men who first balanced one stone over two others must have looked with astonishment at the work of their hands,

and have worshiped the stones they had set up. This element of mystical wonder and awe lasted long through the ages, and is still felt when work is done in the old way by keeping close to nature, necessity, and faith. From the first, ideas of sacredness, of sacrifice, of ritual rightness, of magic stability, of likeness to the universe, of perfection of form and proportion glowed in the heart of the builder, and guided his arm. Wren, philosopher as he was, decided that the delight of man in setting up columns was acquired through worshiping in the groves of the forest; and modern research has come to much the same view, for Sir Arthur Evans shows that in the first European age columns were gods. All over Europe the early morning of architecture was spent in the worship of great stones.[3]

If we go to old Egypt, where the art of building seems first to have gathered power, and where its remains are best preserved, we may read the ideas of the earliest artists. Long before the dynastic period a strong people inhabited the land who developed many arts which they handed on to the pyramid-builders. Although only semi-naked savages using flint instruments in a style much like the bushmen, they were the root, so to speak, of a wonderful artistic stock. Of the Egyptians Herodotus said, "They gather the fruits of the earth with less labor than any other people." With agriculture and settled life came trade and stored-up energy which might essay to improve on caves and pits and other rude dwellings. By the Nile, perhaps, man first aimed to overpass the routine of the barest need, and obey his soul. There he wrought out beautiful vases of fine marble, and invented square building.

At any rate, the earliest known structure actually discovered, a prehistoric tomb found in the sands at Hieraconpolis, is already right-angled. As Lethaby reminds

us, modern people take squareness very much for granted as being a self-evident form, but the discovery of the square was a great step in geometry.[4] It opened a new era in the story of the builders. Early inventions must have seemed like revelations, as indeed they were; and it is not strange that skilled craftsmen were looked upon as magicians. If man knows as much as he does, the discovery of the Square was a great event to the primitive mystics of the Nile. Very early it became an emblem of truth, justice, and righteousness, and so it remains to this day though uncountable ages have passed. Simple, familiar, eloquent, it brings from afar a sense of the wonder of the dawn, and it still teaches a lesson which we find it hard to learn. So also the cube, the compasses, and the keystone, each a great advance for those to whom architecture was indeed "building touched with emotion," as showing that its laws are the laws of the Eternal.

Maspero tells us that the temples of Egypt, even from earliest times, were built in the image of the earth as the builders had imagined it.[5] For them the earth was a sort of flat slab more long than wide, and the sky was a ceiling or vault supported by four great pillars. The pavement, represented the earth; the four angles stood for the pillars; the ceiling, more often flat, though sometimes curved, corresponded to the sky. From the pavement grew vegetation, and water plants emerged from the water; while the ceiling, painted dark blue, was strewn with stars of five points. Sometimes, the sun and moon were seen floating on the heavenly ocean escorted by the constellations, and the months and days. There was a far withdrawn holy place, small and obscure, approached through a succession of courts and columned halls, all so arranged on a central axis as to point to the sunrise. Before the outer gates were

obelisks and avenues of statues. Such were the shrines of the old solar religion, so oriented that on one day in the year the beams of the rising sun, or of some bright star that hailed his coming, should stream down the nave and illumine the altar.[6]

Clearly, one ideal of the early builders was that of sacrifice, as seen in their use of the finest materials; and another was accuracy of workmanship. Indeed, not a little of the earliest work displayed an astonishing technical ability, and such work must point to some underlying idea which the workers sought to realize. Above all things they sought permanence. In later inscriptions relating to buildings, phrases like these occur frequently: "it is such as the heavens in all its quarters;" "firm as the heavens." Evidently the basic idea was that, as the heavens were stable, not to be moved, so a building put into proper relation with the universe would acquire magical stability. It is recorded that when Ikhnaton founded his new city, four boundary stones were accurately placed, that so it might be exactly square, and thus endure forever. Eternity was the ideal aimed at, everything else being sacrificed for that aspiration.

How well they realized their dream is shown us in the Pyramids, of all monuments of mankind the oldest, the most technically perfect, the largest, and the most mysterious. Ages come and go, empires rise and fall, philosophies flourish and fail, and man seeks him out many inventions, but they stand silent under the bright Egyptian night, as fascinating as they are baffling. An obelisk is simply a pyramid, albeit the base has become a shaft, holding aloft the oldest emblems of solar faith—a Triangle mounted on a Square. When and why this figure became holy no one knows, save as we may conjecture that it was one of those sacred stones which gained its sanctity in times far back of

all recollection and tradition, like the *Ka'aba* at Mecca. Whether it be an imitation of the triangle of zodiacal light, seen at certain times in the eastern sky at sunrise and sunset, or a feat of masonry used as a symbol of Heaven, as the Square was an emblem of Earth, no one may affirm.[7] In the Pyramid Texts the Sun-god, when he created all the other gods, is shown sitting on the apex of the sky in the form of a Phoenix—that Supreme God to whom two architects, Suti and Hor, wrote so noble a hymn of praise.[8]

White with the worship of ages, ineffably beautiful and pathetic, is the old light-religion of humanity—a sublime nature-mysticism in which Light was love and life, and Darkness evil and death. For the early man light was the mother of beauty, the unveiler of color, the elusive and radiant mystery of the world, and his speech about it was reverent and grateful. At the gates of the morning he stood with uplifted hands, and the sun sinking in the desert at eventide made him wistful in prayer, half fear and half hope, lest the beauty return no more. His religion, when he emerged from the night of animalism, was a worship of the Light—his temple hung with stars, his altar a glowing flame, his ritual a woven hymn of night and day. No poet of our day, not even Shelley, has written lovelier lyrics in praise of the Light than those hymns of Ikhnaton in the morning of the world.[9] Memories of this religion of the dawn linger with us today in the faith that follows the Day-Star from on high, and the Sun of Righteousness—One who is the Light of the World in life, and the Lamp of Poor Souls in the night of death.

Here, then, are the real foundations of Masonry, both material and moral: in the deep need and aspiration of man, and his creative impulse; in his instinctive Faith, his quest of the Ideal, and his love of the Light. Underneath all his

building lay the feeling, prophetic of his last and highest thought, that the earthly house of his life should be in right relation with its heavenly prototype, the world-temple—imitating on earth the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. If he erected a square temple, it was an image of the earth; if he built a pyramid, it was a picture of a beauty shown him in the sky; as, later, his cathedral was modelled after the mountain, and its dim and lofty arch a memory of the forest vista—its altar a fireside of the soul, its spire a prayer in stone. And as he wrought his faith and dream into reality, it was but natural that the tools of the builder should become emblems of the thoughts of the thinker. Not only his tools, but, as we shall see, the very stones with which he worked became sacred symbols—the temple itself a vision of that House of Doctrine, that Home of the Soul, which, though unseen, he is building in the midst of the years.

FOOTNOTES:

1. *Primitive Art in Egypt.*
2. Chapter iii, aphorism 2.
3. *Architecture*, by Lethaby, chap. i.
4. *Architecture*, by Lethaby, chap. ii.
5. *Dawn of Civilization*.
6. *Dawn of Astronomy*, Norman Lockyer.
7. Churchward, in his *Signs and Symbols of Primordial Man* (chap. xv), holds that the pyramid was typical of heaven, Shu, standing on seven steps, having lifted the sky from the earth in the form of a triangle; and that at each point stood one of the gods, Sut and Shu at the base, the apex being the Pole Star where Horus of the Horizon had his throne. This is, in so far, true; but the pyramid emblem was older than Osiris, Isis, and Horus, and runs back into an obscurity beyond knowledge.

8. *Religion and Thought in Egypt*, by Breasted, lecture ix.

9. Ikhnaton, indeed, was a grand, solitary, shining figure, "the first idealist in history," and a poetic thinker in whom the religion of Egypt attained its highest reach. Dr. Breasted puts his lyrics alongside the poems of Wordsworth and the great passage of Ruskin in *Modern Painters*, as celebrating the divinity of Light (*Religion and Thought in Egypt*, lecture ix). Despite the revenge of his enemies, he stands out as a lonely, heroic, prophetic soul —"the first *individual* in time."

THE WORKING TOOLS

It began to shape itself to my intellectual vision into something more imposing and majestic, solemnly mysterious and grand. It seemed to me like the Pyramids in their loneliness, in whose yet undiscovered chambers may be hidden, for the enlightenment of coming generations, the sacred books of the Egyptians, so long lost to the world; like the Sphynx half buried in the desert.

In its symbolism, which and its spirit of brotherhood are its essence, Freemasonry is more ancient than any of the world's living religions. It has the symbols and doctrines which, older than himself, Zarathrustra inculcated; and it seemed to me a spectacle sublime, yet pitiful—the ancient Faith of our ancestors holding out to the world its symbols once so eloquent, and mutely and in vain asking for an interpreter.

And so I came at last to see that the true greatness and majesty of Freemasonry consist in its proprietorship of these and its other symbols; and that its symbolism is its soul.

—Albert Pike, *Letter to Gould*

CHAPTER II
THE WORKING TOOLS

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Never were truer words than those of Goethe in the last lines of *Faust*, and they echo one of the oldest instincts of humanity: "All things transitory but as symbols are sent." From the beginning man has divined that the things open to his senses are more than mere facts, having other and hidden meanings. The whole world was close to him as an infinite parable, a mystical and prophetic scroll the lexicon of which he set himself to find. Both he and his world were so made as to convey a sense of doubleness, of high truth hinted in humble, nearby things. No smallest thing but had its skyey aspect which, by his winged and quick-sighted fancy, he sought to surprise and grasp.

Let us acknowledge that man was born a poet, his mind a chamber of imagery, his world a gallery of art. Despite his utmost efforts, he can in nowise strip his thought of the flowers and fruits that cling to it, withered though they often are. As a fact, he has ever been a citizen of two worlds, using the scenery of the visible to make vivid the realities of the world Unseen. What wonder, then, that trees grew in his fancy, flowers bloomed in his faith, and the victory of spring over winter gave him hope of life after death, while the march of the sun and the great stars invited him to "thoughts that wander through eternity." Symbol was his native tongue, his first form of speech—as, indeed, it is his last—whereby he was able to say what else he could not have uttered. Such is the fact, and even the language in

which we state it is "a dictionary of faded metaphors," the fossil poetry of ages ago.

I

That picturesque and variegated maze of the early symbolism of the race we cannot study in detail, tempting as it is. Indeed, so luxuriant was that old picture-language that we may easily miss our way and get lost in the labyrinth, unless we keep to the right path.[10] First of all, throughout this study of prophecy let us keep ever in mind a very simple and obvious fact, albeit not less wonderful because obvious. Socrates made the discovery—perhaps the greatest ever made—that human nature is universal. By his searching questions he found out that when men think round a problem, and think deeply, they disclose a common nature and a common system of truth. So there dawned upon him, from this fact, the truth of the kinship of mankind and the unity of mind. His insight is confirmed many times over, whether we study the earliest gropings of the human mind or set the teachings of the sages side by side. Always we find, after comparison, that the final conclusions of the wisest minds as to the meaning of life and the world are harmonious, if not identical.

Here is the clue to the striking resemblances between the faiths and philosophies of widely separated peoples, and it makes them intelligible while adding to their picturesqueness and philosophic interest. By the same token, we begin to understand why the same signs, symbols, and emblems were used by all peoples to express their earliest aspiration and thought. We need not infer that one people learned them from another, or that there existed