

UNIVERSAL CO-MASONRY



Address delivered by the V.: Ill.: Bro.: Francesca Arundale 33^o, at the Joint Meeting of the four London Lodges, on Friday, May 21st, 1915.

Co-Masonry at the Beginning and after Thirteen Years.

It is now nearly 13 years since the founding of the first Co-Masonic Lodge in England, and I propose to take a short review of the work done, and also to consider our work in the present and future.

But first I would like, for the benefit of some of our newly initiated brethren, to give a short sketch of the events which led to the foundation of the first Lodge in England.

There was an ordinary masculine Lodge in France belonging to the Loge Symbolique Ecosaise de France. This Lodge which was called "Les Libres Penseurs" determined that sex should not be a bar to entrance into Masonry, so they proceeded to admit a woman, Maria Deraismes, a talented writer and ardent feminist, into the ranks of Free Masonry, and she was duly initiated in 1892, and in 1893 the Co-Masonic order was founded in Paris. Among those 'women who were members of this Lodge - the Droit Humain or Human Duty - was my sister Mrs. Maria Martin, who must not be confused -with Mrs. Georges Martin who was for so long the Grande Maitresse of the Order.

I think I may say that my sister was the first English woman to join Masonry, although legally French, naturalised by her marriage to a Frenchman. There was also Mrs. Cobden Sanderson and a Miss Gray, a celebrated temperance lecturer at that time. I myself joined about two years afterwards and took the Master's degree in the Orient of Zurich.

Why did I join?

My sister was an ardent feminist, and I sympathised most strongly with her views, and the fact that in this movement men and women could work together and that once again women could triumph in a disability removed, was sufficient to draw me within the Order. There was certainly apart from this nothing very attractive in the meetings, the ritual of which was of the most meagre because our brothers there objected to Ritual.

But they were men and women earnestly working together to give a nobler ideal of brotherhood to humanity, and their discussions and papers were very interesting. Although I was a theosophist at that time, I had made no study of Masonry and its symbology and had no idea of the part that Co-Masonry would hold in the future. The Lodges in France were started on political lines-with professed agnosticism, and I remember that one of the questions to which I had to reply before being admitted while still in the state of blindness was " Do you believe in a God ? " this question from my theosophical knowledge was not difficult to answer. The materialism of the French Lodges is to be deplored, but to their karmic credit will be the founding of the Co-Masonic Order although they were unwitting of the development of their action and the power behind it.

I think you all know how an apparently casual remark of Mrs. Besant's first led the way to the establishment of the Co-Masonic movement in England. I was travelling with her on the railway between Ealing and London when she said "I have been told to join the Masonic Order. I know there is a section that admits women, but I do not know where it is to be found." That information I was able to give her with the result that after having formed a Triangle with her and my nephew George Arundale, we proceeded with four others, Bro.: Ursula Bright, Bro.: Esther Bright, Bro.: Eveline Lauder and Bro.: W. B. Lauder to Paris, so that the seven brethren might receive the necessary degrees and thus be able to form a Lodge in England. That was the beginning of the Co-Masonic Order in England, and it was in 1902 on the 26th September that the Lodge Droit Humain No. 6 was consecrated by a Deputation from the Supreme Council in France.

I would like to say here, how much occasion we Co-Masons have to honour and appreciate the work of M. and Mme. Georges Martin, who came over with other members to consecrate the first English Lodge. They both possessed wide and liberal views and in no way sought to bind the Lodges under the obedience of the Supreme Council to the individual views of its members. Provided the Lodges agreed to observe the fundamental principles of Masonry and the particular ideal that men and women should share the privileges and work hand in hand, they imposed no beliefs or rather non-beliefs of their own. So that the acknowledgment of the G.A.O.T.U., although abolished in French Lodges was allowed once more to be the inspiration of our Co-Masonic Lodges in England.

Now what have we done during the years that have elapsed since our first Masonic Lodge was founded, and what have we to do in the future? I have here in my hands a little book which will shortly be published and which will be very useful as giving all possible information about the Order and our Lodges and Chapters. From this book I find we have fourteen Lodges in England and Scotland, three Mark Lodges, one Royal Arch and two Sovereign Chapters.

Many of the representatives of these Lodges I am very pleased to see are with us tonight. Some may have had uphill work to overcome prejudice, but I think one and all will agree that our position becomes better year by year, and that we have to a certain degree overcome active hostility and are winning the respect of many of the older Masons. Indeed, I have many times been told by Masons who have visited our Lodges that the conduct of our ceremonies and the behaviour of our members in Lodge is equal to that in almost any of the English Masculine Lodges. This is saying a very great deal for the young daughters in Masonry.

We have Lodges in India. Not a great many, but there are four regularly working. There is a great difficulty in India because of the social status of the women. It is impossible there to have a gathering like this. But I think the movement will develop. I had the privilege of initiating the first two Indian women, a Brahmin and a Parsee. I consider that a very great step towards what we are aiming at. Now wives may join their husbands in this, which is an enormous step in India. Also, there are triangles in S. Africa, four Lodges in Australia, seventy-six in America, and nine in Holland.

The work of the Co-Masonic Movement, we must remember, is not limited to the carrying out of its ritual as perfectly as possible, beautiful and inspiring as it may be.

What is the underlying object of the Co-Masonic Movement?

We may be sure that with such a V.:. Ill.:. Vice-President Grand Master as our Brother Annie Besant there must be a very great purpose in the Movement. She would not have given months of her time and continued energy to found an organisation for the mere carrying out of beautiful ritual.

Now what was the aim underlying this movement?

In the first place there is the principle that emphasises that sex is no bar to Brotherhood and that divine egos in Humanity can carry on their work together. The ordinary male Masonic Movement is a large movement with a very powerful organisation spreading over most of the countries of the world. It numbers among its adherents rich and poor, learned and distinguished men, philanthropists and scientists. It has the proud boast that all men within its ranks are considered as

brothers, but it has one limitation; it offers brotherhood to only one-half of the human race.

In its external aspect our Co-masonic movement acknowledges the fact that men and women are born together into this world, that they work together, are happy together and suffer together, and we carry this Brotherhood of Nature into our Order and proclaim that women are accepted as brothers and initiated into the duties and privileges of the Order the same as men. If we can steadily and quietly put this idea before our male Masonic brethren and gradually by discipline, steadiness and learning gain a hearing for our Order, we shall certainly do a work for the progress of humanity. There is also the work of interpretation of symbology and a great deal has been done in this direction.

I think our work at the present time should be consolidation, and I would like every Lodge to put that before its members. It is not the drawing in of a large be the aim, although I know it is necessary to have funds. The important work we have to achieve is to consolidate, and make worthy Masons of the members we have.

To the women members I would say that we are a large number of women, and in these times of stress when so many of our brothers, husbands, and those we love are gone or are going to the war, it is necessary to remember that we have been men in the past, and therefore we ought to cultivate the powers of both men and women. We should strive in the absence of the men to develop both the male and female qualities. We should realise the steadiness and firmness and learning and application that men manifest in business, and we must show them that we can apply these same qualities to the Co-Masonic Movement.

Upon us as women devolves a very great responsibility, for upon our behaviour depends the very life of the organisation, its strength and durability. It is very necessary that we should be careful, for having been so long shut out from participation in the mysterious Masonic Order, there might be a tendency for curiosity to bring us in to fathom its mysteries. To our honour be it said, I do not think that this has often been the case; but it behoves all of us women who come into the Co-Masonic body to remember that we have entered a body of workers, and it is for us to see-what work we are most capable of doing, for a mere knowledge of signs and passwords is not sufficient to make us good accepted Masons.

And the men of our Order, those Brothers especially who belonging to the older and exclusive male Masonry have come forward to help us because they feel that the progress of humanity cannot be worked on a one-sided principle, I feel that their motive in entering this Order was not for their own aggrandisement but to help. To them I say that we accept their chivalrous aid with thankfulness, and own that without their kindly help we could have done but little. To all our Brothers I say you have come in to help a great power, and by your strength and gentleness fit yourselves to carry on that work and be ready to assist where help is required, so that each Lodge

may be a worthy channel for the influence of Him who is the Master of all true Masons throughout the world.

Did time permit I have many-things that I might say to you on the work of the Lodge, not about the Ritual, but about the necessity that a joint effort should be made to put every Lodge on its best foundation, for it is not only the R.:W.: M.: who should give his special attention to the work in Masonry, but every member should do the same, and make his part of the work as perfect as possible.