

Of all institutions from time immemorial, that have been established for the purpose of improving the conditions of mankind, Freemasonry stands as pre-eminent in usefulness as it is in age, and this being the oldest society known, I will, first of all, give you a brief outline of its history. I say brief for were I to take you through the intricate windings in the history of Freemasonry, it would take me some two or three hours instead of fifteen minutes.

Great difficulty has been encountered in arriving at the precise time, place and circumstances, in which Freemasonry began. Some writers go so far as to say that from the commencement of the world, we may trace the foundation of Freemasonry. W. Preston, who makes this assertion, qualifies it with the expressions, that, ever since symmetry began and harmony displayed her charms, our Order has had a being. He undoubtedly meant, that its principles were co-existent with the Universe. A prominent Mason has said, "Well, I suppose Adam did wear an apron of some kind."

More moderate writers find its origin about 1044 B.C., in the religious associations formed by the Architects of Tyre, who constituted associations or colleges of Sacred Builders, who were engaged in the construction of Temples and other places of worship. Another writer states that the mysteries and stupendous "Pyramids of Egypt," alleged to have been built by these Sacred Builders or Masons, were hoary with age at the time when Moses was initiated into the secrets and mysteries of the Priestly Order about 1550 B.C.

I remember when a boy at school, we had several Biblical riddles, and one was, "Who was the oldest man that ever lived, that died before his father." The answer, of course, was, Methuselah, who is credited with being the oldest man that ever lived, namely, 969 years, and died before his father "Enoch" who was supposed to have been taken into Heaven without dying. And this same Enoch, according to traditions, fearing that the genuine secrets of Masonry would be lost and swallowed up in the predicted deluge, had the grand secrets engraven on a white stone, and buried them in the bowels of the earth, and built two pillars near the spot, with an inscription in hieroglyphics, denoting what was buried beneath.

Coming down to the time of King Solomon, 994 B.C., we find him calling Hiram, King of Tyre, and his chief architect, Hiram Abiff, (one of the most expert and cunning workmen of his time) as Counsellors and some 113,600 Master Masons, Fellow Crafts and Apprentices, to assist him in building the famous Temple of Jerusalem, and dedicating it to God's service, which is found in the first book of Kings and the 5th chapter. So perfect was the harmony of this organization among such a vast number of workmen, and so systematic the distribution of labor, that Solomon's Temple, with all its gorgeous splendor,