

THE MOTHER GRAND LODGE

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IN the fourteenth century Freemasonry was a society or guild of operative Masons. Originally formed by voluntary association of artisans for mutual benefit, it was afterwards taken under royal protection, and granted many privileges, such as immunity from the Statutes of Labourers. In no essential particular did the societies of Masons differ from those of other guilds; it was a trade society and nothing else. It is true that men not operative Masons were members of the guilds of Masons, and of all the guilds. But that fact is easily accounted for.

In the first place the sheriffs, city officials and other government and municipal officers were required to be present at the general assemblies of the Masons, as well as at those of other guilds, and it is not improbable that they, or some of them, were enrolled among the members.

In the next place, the employers of Masons, or the "lords," as they are called, and the architects, would desire to keep in touch with the workmen, and the workmen would be quite willing to have their countenance and protection.

The greater part of the buildings erected in those days were churches, cathedrals, abbeys and other ecclesiastical edifices, and the ecclesiastical "lords," then as now, desired to know what the members of the secret societies were doing. The Masons were quite willing to have their spiritual pastors and masters among their membership, and to benefit by the protection that membership gave them against the crown and the barons.

But there was another and more effective cause for the acceptance into Masonic bodies of men not operative Masons. All persons engaged in mercantile business, or prac-