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OPERATIVE FREEMASONS OF THE MIDDLE AGES.

The following very interesting article originally appeared in the *Keystone*, but has been extracted by us from the *The Masonic Eclectic* for March:—

Who were the Freemasons of the Middle Ages, and whence did they derive their craft? We shall endeavor to answer these interesting queries.

In the year 672, St. Benedict introduced from France into England the first body of Operative Masons that could build stone churches. Twenty-nine years prior to this, in 643, the Langobardic ruler, Rothar, had recognized these artificers as *Collegia Comacinatorum*—co-macinatorum, that is, associate Masons. On the continent at this period, thereafter for several centuries, the study of architecture was specially cultivated in the monasteries, the Abbots presiding as Masters over the designs, which were executed by those monks that possessed peculiar artistic skill. Each of the larger Abbeys thus became a school of architecture. To the monks were joined, from time to time, as necessity required, secular artificers, who became Brethren of the Cloister, and subject to its discipline. These operative brethren in the year 1001 erected St. Benigne Church, still preserved at Dijon; the Cathedral at Rheims, in 1012; and that at Cambrai, in 1020. Under the patronage of King Robert of France, twenty-one churches were thus erected.

The whole spirit of the age encouraged church building. William of Malmsbury, says: In the Anglo-Norman times a rich man would have imagined that he had lived in vain, if he had not left behind him a church or a monastery as a monument of his piety and munificence. Besides, all who contributed towards them received a remission of penances for sins. William the Conqueror himself built more than thirty monasteries, among which was the noble Battle Abbey. Prior to his reign, King Edgar (A.D. 958-975,) founded over forty monasteries, the most of which were destroyed by the Danes. It seemed that only *man* could destroy those well-built edifices: *time* scarcely ever harmed them. Perhaps their builders followed the advice of the magicians to Vortigern, who was told that in order to lay a foundation that would never yield, he must find a youth that never had a father, kill him, and sprinkle the stones and cement with his blood.

During the twelfth century different Popes favored these bands of builders, and endowed them with exclusive and important privileges. They were allowed to fix their own prices for labor, and were thus exempt from the statutes governing labor in each country that they visited; nevertheless, they were as moderate in their demands for remuneration as they were transcendent in skill. Sir Christopher Wren, himself an eminent architect and Freemason, says in his "Parentalia:" "They styled themselves Freemasons, and