

SUMMARY

SECRETS AND OATHS

Freemasonry in Finnish Society and Public Record 1756–1996

Freemasonry, as defined in this work, is the teaching of a way of life based upon traditions found within the ancient builder's guilds. As a prerequisite for membership it requires a belief in Deity and strives to provide spiritual building elements for men who are interested in self-development. Freemasonry uses old ceremonies and rituals as a means of teaching and attempts to maintain their effectiveness by keeping them secret.

Builder's guilds or operative lodges with a mixed membership consisting of both professional builders and other individuals have existed with certainty within the British Isles from the year 1600. Developing from these communities were the speculative lodges in which discussions were held regarding subjects relating to the building profession as well as issues relating to man's development and at the same time endeavoring to practice charitable work. In 1717 a Grand Lodge was founded in London which sanctioned a Presbyterian priest, Father James Anderson, to undertake the task of preparing a constitution based on rules, regulations and ethical guidelines of the ancient building guilds. The Anderson Constitution was published in 1723 though the backing of theology doctor Theofilus Desagulier, the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of London. This created the basic concept of a moral-philosophical architecture on which to build.

Since 1686 Freemasonry has off and on been accused and deemed responsible for conspiracies and plots against governments as well as being anti-Christ and hostile to the church. We can say that already at its birth, the cradle of Freemasonry was rocked hard. In Finland as well, Freemasonry has traveled through similar difficulties. The first Freemason's lodge began its operation in Finland at the end of the 1750's and was already presented with a powerful critique directed at the ideologies and operation of Freemasonry by the diocesan synod meeting held in Porvoo in 1769.

This work attempts to explain how the time-to-time extreme and often intense pressure formed in the media has come about and why Freemasons in Finland have experienced, in what is my opinion, unfair treatment. Also examined are the questions of how Freemasons themselves have reacted and have been able to affect this situation and how Freemasons have acted as members of society in general. The answers to these questions are sought after from various circles of society as well as from Freemasons and aims to clarify those influences, which throughout the centuries have struck a damaging mark on the fraternity.

Ignited by the age of enlightenment, the all around religious Freemasonry spread rapidly throughout England and almost simultaneously across the European continent and onward to the overseas colonies proclaiming the ideals of freedom of speech and thought as well as brotherhood and humanity. In France it was especially well received taking on a strict Christian form before traveling on to Sweden. In Sweden, the first lodge was founded in 1735. The ground proved to be fruitful and the beginning was made easy as a number of persons of royal birth were counted among its members. In 1756 a lodge was founded in Finland. Impetus for this came from work being carried out at the Viapori Fortress near Helsinki and its garrison. The Finnish St. Johannes Lodge named St. Augustin operated partly in Stockholm and partly in Turku but later on mainly in Helsinki. Throughout its entire period of operation the lodge had 460 members consisting of officers 60.6%, legal representatives 12.6%, civil servants 8.9% and priests 2.8%.

During the operation of the St. Augustin Lodge there were numerous other secret societies working in Finland which over time have become associated with Freemasonry through Finnish folklore. Still one hundred years after their cessation they rise out of the past to cast an extraordinary shadow over Freemasonry.

As a result of Swedish war losses Finland was joined to Russia in 1809. The St. Augustin Lodge remained in operation up until 1808 but was only officially suspended by the Grand Master in 1813. The Russian Czar's attitude towards Freemasonry was loyal at the beginning but gradually became more and more suspicious. The formal injunction on secret societies proclaimed in the years 1822, 1826, and 1848 prohibited Freemasonry throughout entire Russia and Finland as well.

In 1919 several Finnish immigrants to America set about establishing a Lodge of Freemasons in the newly independent Finland. Especially active were Toivo H. Nekton, a lawyer and J.E. Toukola an engineer working in cooperation with the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of New York, Arthur S. Thompkins. The restoration of Freemasonry in Finland can be seen as an act of rapprochement between the peoples of Finland and the United States of America.

Finland's independence directly resulted in the founding of Suomi Lodge No. 1 on the 22nd of August 1922. The 27 men accepted as members came from the upper social level of society and included Jean Sibelius, several influential administrators and businessmen, as well as ministers and ambassadors. In 1923 Tammer Lodge was founded in Tampere and Phoenix Lodge in Turku. The Grand Lodge of Finland was founded in 1924 and by 1939 there were 407 members and 38 foreign Grand Lodges had recognized (approved) the Grand Lodge of Finland's sovereignty.

The rekindling of Freemasonry in Finland could perhaps have been more naturally expected through the aid of Grand Lodges from neighboring western countries but as Finnish interest was directed mainly towards Denmark, England and the United States of America cooperation with the Grand Lodge of Sweden was not productive. At the time Freemasonry was still highly esteemed

in Sweden as the King of Sweden was serving as the Grand Master. The Grand Lodge of Sweden revitalized the St. Augustin Lodge, which began anew in Helsinki.

The newly begun journey of Finnish Freemasonry during the 1920's progressed in a positive way but the arrival of the teachings of the "New World Order" from Germany stuck its thorns into Freemasonry remorselessly. In this recently made independent country Freemasonry was gradually placed as the obverse to aims of patriotism, to national heritage and to the young independent church. When Freemasonry was claimed to be on the side of international Zionists, fanatical patriots began to see it as a threat to both freedom and Finnish culture.

Freemasonry in Finland received a terrible blow when mutilated body parts were found by accident at Tattarisuo near Helsinki in the early fall of 1930. Suspected were medical students who perhaps required body parts for their studies or Freemasons as they were claimed to use body parts in their ritual ceremonies. The medical students were soon eliminated as suspects but Freemasons remained in the headlines for almost two years even though not even a bit of proof was ever presented. It was finally proven in August of 1932 that the murderers were four insane individuals who believed in the supernatural and had received from "above" the instruction to do the mutilations. The guilty were sent to prison for various sentences but the campaign against Freemasonry carried out in the press had left a permanent shadow hanging over Finnish Freemasonry.

The St. Augustin Lodge in Helsinki could count a large number of military officers among its members but in the beginning of the 1930's there were only 22 officers in Finnish Lodges. In connection with the incident at Tattarisuo it was publicly debated whether or not it was appropriate for someone who has given an oath of Freemasonry to serve as a military officer. The debate resulted in having the issue brought before the League of Military Officers in the spring of 1931. A district captain for the home guard, Lieutenant Colonel Paavo Susitaival, presented a statement where the League of Military Officers considered it improper for Finnish military officers to belong to a lodge of Freemasons. The handling of the matter took a long time and led to a letter from the Chief of the Military Forces, Hugo Österman, forbidding his subordinates to belong to Freemason lodges. Following this ban 18 officers and 2 civilians as well as officers from the Swedish Lodges were granted exemption from their membership.

During the 1930's the third attack on Finnish Freemasonry came from the church. The diocesan synod meeting held in Viipuri in autumn 1932 and the church assembly the following spring of 1933 also greatly considered the issue of whether it was appropriate for a servant of the church to belong to a Freemason lodge. Many priests and parish deacons considered Freemasonry to be an anti-Christian belief and claimed the oaths to be in opposition to the Bible. An amendment to the existing Church Law was proposed which would forbid membership in the order. Though this decision was never actually carried out

the public debate surrounding the issue once again placed Freemasonry into a bad light.

The political extremes of Germany during the 1930's were model examples of the anti-Freemasonry front. The Academic Karelian Society, the Lapua Movement, the Citizen Patriots, the Viitasaari Patriot Society as well as other national socialist organizations continuously kept the question of Freemasonry open by publishing the names of Freemasons and by the financing of anti-Freemasonry printed material.

In autumn of 1939 there were five lodges operating under the Grand Lodge of Finland of which one of the lodges was Swedish speaking. Altogether the members accounted for 407 men. Membership in the Swedish lodges was somewhat higher. Bitter persecution caused not only military officers to resign membership but other non-military members as well. The operation of lodges became somewhat paralyzed, members became passive and new members were not to be found. Active Freemasons under the Grand Lodge of Finland was down to 278 by the beginning of the Winter War.

The decade ended as Member of Parliament, Lieutenant Colonel Paavo Susi-taipale, introduced a motion, which aimed at banning Freemasonry activity in Finland by law. The motion was never passed and it was thrown out without discussion on the 23rd of April 1940.

When President Kyösti Kallio left office on the 27th of November 1939 the Finnish Parliament approved a deviation rule concerning presidential elections; the strongest candidate was the Prime Minister Risto Ryti who was a member of Suomi Lodge No. 1. Finnish Freemasons were very concerned about foreign politics and its effects on Freemasonry in Finland. Since the German position on Freemasonry was known to be opposing it was feared that the situation could be seen as though Freemason Lodges in Finland were provoking foreign political operation.

Prime Minister Ryti suggested in his discussions with other Freemasons that at some particular political time in the future interruption of Freemasonry activity could have desirable effects for the country and possibly could be even considered essential. He emphasized that any motion for interruption should come from Freemasons themselves. Otherwise the situation could be interpreted by the Americans as being an imposed sanction and therefore very insulting while the interruption of Swedish Freemasonry would be seen as a direct insult to the King of Sweden himself as he was the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Sweden. Acting in complete agreement with the Finnish government, both Freemasonry organizations' high command interrupted all activities at the beginning of 1941. When Ryti was elected President of the Finnish Republic the Finnish Freemasons no longer maintained their relationship with him.

During the World War II only the small elements of the Finnish national socialists continued to spread hatred for Jews and carry out anti-Freemasonry activity. The war ended for Finland on the 4th of September 1944 and already by late fall of the same year planning for resuming activity was taking place. Due

to the unavailability of the Grand Master, the Assistant Grand Master and the Deputy Grand Masters operation could only be started by spring of 1945. It wasn't an easy task. The lodge meeting facilities had been given up, parts of the furnishings were lost and lodge assets had been donated to charity.

Connected with the ending of the war was an interesting phase, which as such had no direct implications to Freemasonry; the war criminal trials which included three Freemasons: Risto Ryti as the accused, Toivo Tarjanne as the prosecuting attorney, and Hjalmar Procope as the defense attorney. The trial was not effected by their membership in Freemasonry and Toivo Tarjanne was later to be elected Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Finland.

The 1950's and 1960's were periods of enthusiastic building and the Freemasonry movement in Finland was able to develop in peace until the later part of the 1970's. By the middle of the decade there were altogether 75 lodges operating in the country. Gradually there began to appear newspaper articles in which Freemasons were suspected and accused of cronyism and once again the debate began concerning Freemasonry oaths and the law of the land and also attention was given to the claim that the rituals were anti-religious. Sensational articles were written containing suspicions and rumors, as well as claims from earlier published material. Pictures and drawings from foreign street magazines were used as illustrations.

Publicity in the 1980's became almost a complete repetition of the 1930's for Freemasonry in Finland. The P2 scandal in Italy brought Freemasonry to the forefront of the media and even though the P2 lodge was not an approved lodge of Freemasons it was used as an example for discussions regarding the suitability of Freemasonry in modern society. With the ambiguity of the circumstances surrounding the construction of the Helsinki Metro this subject became emphasized and exaggerated. The Metro administration and management was placed on trial charged with misconduct and bribery. Accused were 50 persons among them 2 Freemasons. One of the Freemasons received a sentence. When the media discovered that the sitting judge was himself a Freemason the press developed an entire series on the "great trial of Freemasonry" and used a good deal of other collected filler material on Freemasonry.

During the years of 1981–90 there were 1411 articles published on Freemasonry of which 595 were negative, 633 news items, 56 groundless and irrelevant and only 127 positive. Subjects other than the Metro trial and the P2 scandal were municipal politics, the Freemasonry oath in relation to oath of office, the issue of non-public Freemason membership lists, church and religious questions as well as general accusations and slander. The electronic media also presented news on Freemasonry but they handled it in a much more professional way than did the press. As the result of a libelous article on Freemasons published in *Seura* magazine, journalist Eeropekka Rislakki received a 6 month conditional prison sentence; no other sentences were handed down to journalists. The Grand Lodge of Finland sent out only 2 corrections during the entire 10 year period as they had found out earlier that the media was unwilling to publish them and that the opinion was that responding to false accusations was generally considered to be unnecessary.

Queries surrounding Freemasonry were introduced several times in the parliament during the 1980's. The most active of those submitting inquiries and motions were members of the Finnish Left, Heli Astala and Paula Eenilä and the representatives of the small Finnish Rural Party, Heikki Rinne and Sulo Aittoniemi. Each of the respective Minister of Justice's responses to the inquiries emphasized that Freemasonry in Finland is a controlled civic activity based on Finnish Law and that nothing has ever been demonstrated which would present cause for intervention in its activities.

A discussion within church circles initiated from the Oulu diocese meeting in autumn of 1981. Anti-Freemasonry addresses presented at the meeting forced Finnish Freemasons to find an open forum for discussions with representatives of the church. These discussions led to an examination directed by the Church Research Center. Theology Doctor Harri Heino's first research report, "Freemasonry and Christianity", opened understanding of the religious beliefs of Freemasons and demonstrated that Freemasonry is not a religion or an institution competing with the church. Doctor Heino continued his research and again published a report in 1995 entitled, "What Does A Freemason Believe?". The report examines the values of Finnish Freemasons, their ethics and their faith. It demonstrated that Finnish Freemasons deeply respect both Christian and societal values more than Finnish men of the same age do in general.

When comparing the pressure placed on Freemasonry during the 1930's with the events of the 1980's one can find a good deal of similarity. Despite the rapid rise in general knowledge and the explosive development of the media the prevention and control of prejudices and negative attitudes continued to be extremely difficult. Within the media some continued to seek financial gain and sensationalism, certain church circles still had considerable distrust and suspicion, and some politicians seemed to grab anything which might help them to build a political career; these remained everyday occurrences but they were unpleasant events for Freemasons.

One important difference from the 1930's has to be said: the Finnish military establishment did not present a single suspicion or accusation against Freemasonry during the entire period of sensationalism of the 1980's. Freemason military officers had convincingly shown that patriotic overall well being and defending one's country were every Freemasons absolute duty.

The two most forefront issues of the conflict between Freemasonry and Finnish society described in this work are "secrets and oaths", the secrecy of the rituals of Freemasonry and the oaths of silence which are given in order to ensure their perpetuation and effectiveness. Disharmony between the more openly developing society and the supposed Freemasons' secret society of old conventions and traditions is still present despite the fact that Freemasons have been more visible in the media than ever before. Despite the abundant amount of material generated by the Finnish media it has not been able to clarify understanding of the organization but has even made the subject more confusing. Since Freemasons do not have an equal opportunity to rectify on their behalf an understanding of their values and activities, the situation has not been corrected.

In the mind of the Freemason, their promise (obligation) should not be expressed by using the term “oath”, as an oath binds its giver outwardly, towards other individuals whereas the obligation of Freemasonry is a promise to oneself. The obligation of Freemasonry does not conflict with an oath of office or a military oath. Open discussion on this subject has been effected by claims from the media that in addition to the ritual there exist other things that are also considered secret. A good deal of attention has been given to the claim that Freemasons pledge in their obligation to submit to terrible punishment should the obligation be broken. The Finnish legal authorities previously mentioned have not found any basis for these charges.

Like the claim concerning the Freemasonry obligation, the issues surrounding the rituals are still open despite the fact that discussions about the rituals have become more candid. The media has been reluctant to accept the explanation that the secret is such that one must undergo the ritual in order to understand what it is, and it becomes exposed only through one’s own experience. Therefore, it cannot be published in printed material nor presented in a play or television performance.

Research shows that Freemasonry in Finland has become the final bogeyman used to frighten the citizens of a society seeking the intimacy and the protection of minorities and, moreover, this slander and abuse has gone unpunished. It has been impossible for Freemasons to maintain balance or defend themselves from this media crossfire. The most ferocious combatant of Freemasonry, Paavo Susitaival, declared in 1932 that “Freemasons have partially admitted or at the very least, by not disputing, allowed public claims that they demand their members to swear oaths containing the threat of death”. In 1985 a journalist from Savonlinna announced that “the slandered and the defamed make it easier on themselves by not demanding redress to their honor because the press will write what it wants to anyway”. Silence has been interpreted to mean that the claims are true while defense and redress is seen as an admission of guilt.

The creation of outsider’s attitudes has been greatly affected by the Freemason’s reluctance to a larger openness. Research shows that openness is gradually improving due to pressure from society over the past decade. A total American-like public exposure for Finnish Freemasonry remains a long ways away.

During the process of clarifying the reasons for this conflict the motives for joining a Lodge of Freemasons, the age structure of its membership, the distribution of professions, the basis of education, the ethics and religious values as well as Freemason activities in society have also been researched. The most important motive for joining is considered to be the need for self-improvement and for expanding one’s circle of friends; the secrecy associated with Freemasonry or the possible potential financial advantages arising from joining the organization mean very little to candidates or even long term members. The age of joining as well as the median age of its members has continuously risen; the current joining age is on the average 42,2 and the median member age is 52,3. The general professions are managing director,

engineer, doctor, lawyer, bank director, school dean or teacher, sales manager, forester, and architect. 59,8% of its members are found within the 25 most general professions. The research shows that 54,1% have an academic degree from an institution of higher education and 32,2% are university or college level. Out of the entire male population of age 24 years and above the corresponding figures are 12,5 % and 43 %.

The Finnish fraternity of Freemasonry has developed admirably despite all adversity and setback; there have been many that have found a wealth of knowledge contained in Freemasonry and have reinforced the values of the organization and have deeply absorbed the teachings. Supplementing their work have been good builders, organizers and leaders. Since 1922, about 12000 men have joined Finnish Freemasonry lodges, in 1996 the total membership was greater than 7000.

Translated by Louis Handley