

Leland-Locke: »Ancient MS on Free Masonry«

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Ancient MS on Free Masonry.

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Copy of a small Pamphlet, consisting of 12 Pages in Octavo, printed at Franckfort, in Germany, in 1748, entitled,

Ein Brief Von dem Beruchmten Herrn Herrn
Johann Locke, betreffend die Frey-Maurerren.
So auf einem Schreib-Tisch eines verstorbenen Bruders ist
gefunden worden.

THAT IS,

A LETTER of the famous Mr JOHN LOCKE,
relating to FREE-MASONRY; found in the Desk or Scritoir
of a deceased Brother.

A Letter from the learned Mr JOHN LOCKE to the Rt Hon. *** Earl of
****, with an old Manuscript on the Subject of Free-Masonry.

MY LORD,

May 6, 1696.

I Have at length by the help of Mr. C——ns procured a Copy of that M. S. in the Bodleian Library, which you were so curious to see: and in obedience to your Lordship's commands, I herewith send it to you. Most of the Notes annex'd to it, are what I made Yesterday for the Reading of my Lady MASHAM, who is become so fond of masonry, as to say, that she now more than ever wishes herself a Man, that she might be capable of Admission into the Fraternity.

The M.S. of which this is a Copy, appears to be about 160 Years old; Yet (as Your Lordship will observe by the Title) it is itself a Copy of one yet more Ancient by about 100 Years: For the Original is said to have been the Hand-writing of K. H. VI. Where that Prince had it is at present an Uncertainty: But it seems, to me to be an Examination (taken perhaps before the king) of some one of the 'Brotherhood' of MASONS; among whom he enter'd himself, as 'tis said, when he came out of his Minority, and thenceforth put a Stop to a Persecution that had been rais'd against them: But I must not detain Your Lordship longer by my Prefaces from the thing itself.

Certayne Duckhyons, wryth answerses to the same,
Concernynge the

Mysterie of Maconrye;

wrentenne by the hande of kynge Henrye the Sixthe of
the Name, and saythfullve copped by me (1) Johan
Leylande Antiquarius, by the Commaunde of His (2)
Highnesse.

They

(1) John Leylande was appointed by King Henry the eighth, at the dissolution of MONASTERIES, to search for, and save such books and records as were valuable among them. He was

a man of great labour, and industry.

(2) His Highnesse, meaning the said King HENRY the eighth. Our kings had not then the title of majesty.

They be as followethe :

Quest. What mote ytt be ? (3)

Ans. Ytt beeth the Skylle of Nature, the understonnyng of the myghte that ys hereynne, and its sondrye Werckynges; sonderlyche, the Skylle of Redenynngs, of Waighthes, and Metynnges, and the treu manere of Faconnyng al thynges for Mannes Use, headlye, Dwellynges, and Buyllynge of alle Kindes, and al other thynges that make Gudde to Manne.

Quest. Where dyd ytt begyne ?

Ans. Ytt dyd begynne with the (4) fyrste menne yn the Este, which were before the (5) fyrste Manne of the Weste, and comynge Westlye, ytt hathe broughte herwyth alle Confortes to the wylde and Confortlesse.

Quest. Who dyd brynge ytt Westlye ?

Ans. The (6) Venetians whoo beyng Grate Merchaundes, comed fyrste fromme the Este ynn Venetia, for the commodytie of Marchaundyng beithe Este and Weste, bey the redde and Myddlelonde Sees.

Quest. Howe comed ytt yn Engelande ?

Ans. Peter Gower (7) a Grecian, journeyedde for kunnyng yn Egypte, and yn Syria, and yn everyche Londe whereas the Venetians hadde plauntedde Maconrye, and Wynnyng Entrauce yn al Lodges of Maconnes, he lerned muche, and retournedde, and woned yn Grecia Magna (8) wachlyng, and becommynge a myghtye

(3) *What mote ytt be?* that is, what may this myllery of MASONRY be?—The answer imports, that it consits in natural, mathematical, and mechanical knowledge. Some part of which (as appears by what follows) the masons pretend to have taught the rest of mankind, and some part they still conceal.

(4.) (5.) *Fyrste menne yn the Este &c.* It should seem by this that MASONS believe there were men in the *East* before ADAM, who is called the *fyrste Manne of the Weste*; and that arts, and sciences began in the *East*. Some authors of great note for learning have been of the same opinion; and it is certain, that *Europe* and *Africa* (which in respect to *Asia* may be call'd western countries) were wild and savage, long after arts and politeness of manners were in great perfection in *China*, and the *Indies*.

(6.) *The Venetians &c.* In the times of Monkish ignorance 'tis no wonder that the *Phenicians* should be mistaken for the *Venetians*. Or perhaps, if the people were not taken one for the other, similitude of sound might deceive the clerk who first took down the examination. The *Phenicians* were the greatest voyagers among the ancients, and were in *Europe* thought to be the inventors of letters, which perhaps they brought from the *East* with other arts.

(7.) *Peter Gower.* This must be another mistake of the writer. I was puzzled at first to guess who PETER GOWER should be, the name being perfectly *English*; or how a *Greek* should come by such a name: but as soon as I thought of PYTHAGORAS, I could scarce forbear smiling, to find that PHILOSOPHER had undergone a METEMPSYCHOSIS he never dreamt of. We need only consider the *French* pronunciation of his NAME PYTHAGORE, that is, PETAGORE, to conceive how easily such a mistake might be made by an unlearned clerk. That PYTHAGORAS travelled for knowledge into EGYPT &c. is known to all the learned, and that he was initiated into several different orders of PRIESTS, who in those days kept all their learning secret from the vulgar, is as well known. PYTHAGORAS also, made every GEOMETRICAL theorem a secret, and admitted only such to the knowledge of them, as had first undergone a five years silence. He is supposed to be the inventor of the XLVII. of the first book of EUCLID, for which in the joy of his heart; 'tis said he sacrific'd a Hecatomb. He also knew the true system of the world lately reviv'd by COPERNICUS; and was certainly a most wonderful man. See his life by DION. HAL.

(8.) *Grecia Magna.* A part of *Italy* for.

with Notes, by Mr LOCKE.

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myghte (9) Wyseacre, and gratelyche renowned, and her he framed a grate Lodge at Groton (10) and maked many Maconnes, some wherofse dyd journeye yn Fraunce, and maked manye Maconnes, wherfromme, yn Procelse of Tyme, the Arte passed yn Engelonde.

Quest. Dothe Maconnes descouer here Artes unto Odkers?

Ans. Peter Gower whenne he journeyedde to lernne, was fyrste (11) made, and anonne techedde; evenne soe shulde all odhers be yn recht. Natheles (12) Maconnes hauethe alweys yn everyche Tyme from Tyme to Tyme communitatedde to Mannkynde soche of her Secrettes as generallyche myghte be usefulle; they haueth keped backe soche allein as shulde be harmefulle yff they commed yn euylle Haundes, oder soche as ne myghte be holpyng wythouten the Tychynges to be joynedde herwythe in the Lodge, oder soche as do bynde the Freres more strongelyche togeder, bey the Proffytte, and commodytye comyng to the Confrerie herfromme.

Quest. Whatte Artes haneth the Maconnes techedde Mankynde?

Ans. The Artes (13) AGRICULTURA, ARCHITECTURA, ASTRONOMIA, GEOMETRIA, NUMERES, MUSICA, POESIE, KYMISTRYE, GOVERNEMENTE, and RELYGYONNE.

Quest. Howe commethe Maconnes more teachers than odher Menne?

Ans. They hemselfe haueth allein the (14) Arte of synlyng neue Artes, whyche Art the fyrste Maconnes receaued from Godde; by the whyche they fyndethe whatte Artes hem plesethe, and the treu Way of techyng the same. Whatt odher Menne doethe fynde out, ys onelyche bey chaunce, and herfore but lytel I tro.

Quest. Whatt dothe the Maconnes concele, and hyde?

Ans. They concelethe the Arte of synlyng neue Artes, and shattys for herte
owne

formerly so called, in which the GREEKS had settled a large colony.

(9) *Wyseacre*. This word at present signifies simpleton, but formerly had a quite contrary meaning. *Weisager* in the old SAXON, is PHILOSOPHER, wiseman, or wizard; and having been frequently used ironically, at length came to have a direct meaning in the ironical sense. Thus DUNS SCOTUS, a man fam'd for the subtilty and acuteness of his understanding, has by the same method of irony, given a general name to modern dunces.

(10) *Groton*. GROTON is the name of a place in ENGLAND. The place here meant is CROTONA a city of GRECIA MAGNA, which in the time of PYTHAGORAS was very populous.

(11) *Fyrste made*. The word MADE I suppose has a particular meaning among the MASONS, perhaps it signifies, initiated.

(12) *Maconnes haueth communitatedde &c.* This PARAGRAPH hath something remarkable in it. It contains a justification of the secrecy so much boasted of by MASONS, and so much blamed by others; asserting that they

have in all ages discover'd such things as might be useful, and that they conceal such only as would be hurtful either to the world or themselves. What these secrets are, we see afterwards.

(13) *The Arts*. AGRICULTURA &c. It seems a bold pretence, this, of the MASONS, that they have taught mankind all these arts. They have their own authority for it; and I know not how we shall disprove them. But what appears most odd is, that they reckon religion among the arts.

(14) *Arte of synlyng neue Artes*. The art of inventing arts, must certainly be a most useful art. My LORD BACON'S NOVUM ORGANUM, is an attempt towards somewhat of the same kind. But I much doubt, that if ever the MASONS had it, they have now lost it; since so few new arts have been lately invented, and so many are wanted. The IDEA I have of such an art is, that it must be something proper to be apply'd in all the sciences generally, as ALGEBRA is in numbers, by the help of which new rules of arithmetic are and may be found.

Kunynge of Masonry.

owne Proffytte, and (15) Preise: they concelethe the Arte of kepyngē (16) Secrettes, thatt for the Worlde mayeth nothinge concele from them. They concelethe the arte of Wunderwerckynge, and of fore sayinge thynges to comme, thatt so thay same artes may not be usedde of the wyckedde to an euylle Ende; thay also concelethe the (17) Arte of chaunges, the Wey of Wynnyngē the Facultye (18) of Abrac, the Skille of becommynge guide and parfyghte wythouten the Holpynges of Fere, and Hope; and the Uniuerselle (19) Longage of Maconnes.

Quest. Wylle he teche me thay same Artes?

Ans. Ye shalle be techedde yf ye be werthye, and able to lerne.

Quest. Dothe alle Maconnes kunnte more then odher Menne?

Ans. Not so. Thay onlyche haueth recht, and Occasyonne more then odher Menne to kunnte, butt many doeth sale yn Capacity, and manye more doth want indutrye, thatt ys Perneceffarye for the gaynyngē all Kunynge.

Quest. Are Maconnes gudder Menne then odhers?

Ans. Some Maconnes are nott so Vertuous as some other Menne; but yn the moste Parte, thay be more gude then thay woulde be yf thay war not Maconnes.

Quest. Doth Maconnes love eidther odher myghtylye as beeth sayde?

Ans. Yea verylyche, and yt may not odherwyse be: For gude Menne, and true, kennyngē eidher odher to be soche, doeth always love the more as thay be mote Gude.

Here endethe the Questyonnes, and Awnsweres.

A Glos-

(15) *Preise.* It seems the MASONS have a great regard to the reputation as well as the profit of their order; since they make it one reason for not divulging an art in common, that it may do honour to the possessors of it. I think in this particular they shew too much regard for their own society, and too little for the rest of MANKIND.

(16) *Arte of kepyngē Secrettes.* What kind of an art this is I can by no means imagine. But certainly such an art the MASONS must have: for tho' as some people suppose, they should have no secret at all; even that must be a secret which being discover'd would expose them to the highest ridicule: and therefore it requires the utmost caution to conceal it.

(17) *Arte of Chaunges.* I know not what this means, unless it be the transmutation of metals.

(18) *Facultye of Abrac.* Here I am utterly in the dark.

(19) *Uniuerselle Longage of Maconnes.* An universal language has been much desired by the learned of many ages. This a thing rather to be wished than hop'd for. But it seems the MASONS pretend to have such a thing among them. If it be true, I guess it must be something like the language of the PANTOMIMES among the ancient ROMANS, who are said to be able, by signs only, to express and deliver any

oration intelligibly to men of all nations, and languages. A man who has all these arts and advantages, is certainly in a condition to be envied: but we are told, that this is not the case with all MASONS; for tho' these arts are among them, and all have a right and an opportunity to know them, yet some want capacity, and others indutry to acquire them. However of all their arts, and secrettes, that which I most desire to know is, *The Skille of becommynge gude and parfyghte*; and I wish it were communicated to all mankind, since there is nothing more true than the beautiful sentence contained in the last answer, "that the better men are, the more they love one another." Virtue having in itself something so amiable as to charm the hearts of all that behold it.

I know not what effect the sight of this old paper may have upon your LORDSHIP; but for my own part I cannot deny, that it has so much raised my curiosity; as to induce me to enter myself into the fraternity; which I am determin'd to do (if I may be admitted) the next time I go to LONDON, (and that will be shortly.)

I am, my Lord,

Your LORDSHIP's most obedient,
and most humble Servant,
JOHN LOCKE.

Glossary.—Adventurer on Criticism.

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A GLOSSARY to explain the Words in larger Characters in the foregoing.

Allein, <i>only</i>	Kunne, <i>know</i>	Recht, <i>right</i>
Alweys, <i>always</i>	Kunnyng, <i>knowledge</i>	Reckenyngs, <i>numbers</i>
Beithe, <i>both</i>	Make Gudde, <i>are benefi-</i>	Sonderlyche, <i>particularly</i>
Commoditye, <i>conveniency</i>	<i>cial</i>	Skylle, <i>knowledge</i>
Confrerie, <i>Fraternity</i>	Meiynge, <i>measures</i>	Wacklyng, <i>growing</i>
Faconnyng, <i>forming</i>	Mote, <i>may</i>	Werck, <i>operation</i>
Fore sayinge, <i>prophecying</i>	Myddlelonde, <i>Mediterra-</i>	Wey, <i>way</i>
Freres, <i>brethren</i>	<i>nean</i>	Whereas, <i>where</i>
Headiye, <i>chiefly</i>	Myghte, <i>power</i>	Woned, <i>dwelt</i>
Hem plesethe, <i>they please</i>	Occalyonne, <i>opportunity</i>	Wunderwerkyng, <i>work-</i>
Hemselfe, <i>themselves</i>	Oder, <i>or</i>	<i>ing miracles</i>
Her, <i>there, their</i>	Onelyche, <i>only</i>	Wyld, <i>savage</i>
Hereynne, <i>therein</i>	Perneceffarye, <i>absolutely</i>	Wynnyng, <i>gaining</i>
Herwyth, <i>with it</i>	<i>necessary</i>	Ynn, <i>into</i>
Holpyng, <i>beneficial</i>	Preile, <i>honour</i>	