FREEMASONRY

and

THE SEARCH FOR

UTOPIA

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Freemasonry and the Search for Utopia

*This paper had its origins in a short story written some fifteen years ago for my grandson. In **'James goes to Utopia'** James, age 12, training for a cross country cycle race, crashes into a tree and hallucinates a sequence of visits to strange utopian worlds each of which, according to its inhabitants was truly 'utopian'. James found each at odds with his late twentieth century upbringing and enjoyed attendant adventures before coming round and realising it had all been a dream but a dream that had given him food for thought. Re-visiting that story during a period of disc tidying the thought struck me that there were parallels with the worlds James had encountered and the thrust of Samuel Johnson's **'Rasselas'**. Just as James learnt something about himself from his quest so Rasselas learnt that benefit comes from the quest not the achievement. The essence of the quest for both was about perceptions and the experience of the world. The links with Freemasonry began to take shape during a Lodge of Instruction when the differing perspectives offered by a winding staircase, correctly climbed, were discussed during a consideration of the Second Degree.*

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The word 'utopia' first appeared in 1516 when it was coined by Sir Thomas More to describe an imaginary island on which had been established perfect legal, social and political systems [1]. It was created from the Greek '*ou*' or not and '*topos*' place, thus the original '*outopos'* simply meant 'no place' or nowhere. Later More coined the word '*eutopia'*, from '*eu'* or good plus *'topos'* to describe a place where all forms of organisation were perfect and all things were 'good'. This in turn, albeit some 350 years later, gave rise to 'dystopia' (*dys*, bad or difficult) a place where all things are 'bad' or dysfunctional [2]. For present purposes *'Utopia'* is used for an imaginary but desirable 'good place' which can be achieved if the right pathway can be found.

One key question has to be addressed; how, over the years, have philosophers and writers perceived 'Utopia'? Superficially that question has been answered by definition, '***a desirable good place which can be attained if the correct pathway can be found***'. But one man's 'desirable good place' may not be another's. Carried to extremes, 'good' turns on a personally defined value judgement. Is a 'desirable good place' as defined, by say, the Marquis de Sade [3] '*good'*? If it is then de Sade's Utopia is going to be purgatory for most women and by definition Utopia must be 'desirably good' to all. A clear difficulty emerges; can any social, or physical or communal environment be universally good for man, woman and child if it exists in any form other than some experience or process to which all have access and from which all have equal levels of capability to derive maximum benefit? That, in turn, begs the question about the condition of persons within that process and raises fundamental questions about individual freedom that lead into the complex realms of social theory, religious beliefs, political dogma and what it means to be human. Therein, perhaps, lies the nature of the putative Masonic pathway.

Let these issues be acknowledged and then set aside temporarily at least. If the definition, '*a desirable good place*', is critically examined 'Utopia' cannot exist as a constant, permanent state not least because it ignores the inherent restlessness of the human mind, the uncertainties of life and the vagaries of the human condition; it is indeed '*no place'*. If it is to exist at all it must, in some way, be a process that enriches the individual and offers a measure of strength to the person creating it. It becomes a mental condition, a state of utopian awareness that creates a place of recovery, recreation and restoration; a secure, albeit temporary, refuge from the greater world.

English Freemasonry in its present form was fashioned in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. It gained considerable momentum during the so-called Age of Enlightenment. Scholars dispute the precise dates for this phenomenon and indeed there is a strong case for avoiding any attempt to put a firm or precise date upon an *'Age'* beyond saying that, in England, the '*Age of Enlightenment'* may have commenced with the writings of John Locke: his *Essay on Human Understanding* was published in 1687 and ended with the emergence of Romanticism around 1790. Locke's essay fell on the fertile ground which had begun to appear after the Restoration of 1660, yet speculative Freemasonry was in existence in the 1640's, hence the difficulty of dating this *'Age'* if it predicates freedom of thought and speech. The *Age of Enlightenment* was a Janus type phenomenon during which liberated, enlightened and imaginative thinkers began to explore the physical and metaphysical worlds with increasing energy and enthusiasm whilst constantly, and no little apprehension, looking over their shoulders at the legacy of the world that lay behind them. Was Freemasonry a product of the Age of Enlightenment or one of the vehicles that carried it forward?

To seek for the possible sources of the dynamic driving this phenomenon it is necessary to look into the wider world of the age. The Reformation and the rise of a protestant church had shaken off the constraints of Catholicism, diminished the power of the Papacy in Western Europe, freed thought from the shackles of the Middle Ages and left behind a long lasting legacy of hatred, suspicion and fear. Voyages of circumnavigation and the work of merchants, traders and explorers were beginning to engender a new perception of the physical world and a richer appreciation of the complexity of human life and the natural world. Researchers into the physical world or *natural philosophers* as they liked to think of themselves, were beginning to probe the mysteries of life and increasingly men were tempted to trace the development of intellectual truth '*even to the throne of God himself'* [4]; dethroning, at last, St Augustine whose reluctance to challenge the perceived wisdom and authority of God had hamstrung philosophers for centuries. This bold and logical decision came at a price: it earned the suspicion and enmity of the established Churches despite the Freemasonic argument not denying the existence of a Supreme Being.

What lay behind this opposition was what the established churches perceived as a challenge to their monopoly of knowledge and a threat to their quest for world dominion. The battle between the temporal and spiritual powers had reached a high level of intensity during the Middle Ages and had developed in different forms thereafter. The action of Napoleon Bonaparte in crowning himself at his own coronation as Emperor in 1804 was a later manifestation of the same argument.

Driving this quest for knowledge was the belief that in some way the world would be 'better' and a state of perfection closer if their researches bore practical fruit. It was this eagerness to embrace an all-encompassing view of the physical and metaphysical worlds that led men like Sir Christopher Wren and Sir Isaac Newton to find no inconsistency between their great work and their beliefs in fairies, magical cures, witchcraft and dark forces. It is possible to argue that apart from their futile quest for the philosopher's stone, the alchemists, of which Newton was a leading member, were pursuing a more significant pathway in Masonic terms. The ultimate goal of the alchemist was the creation of a state of mind by prayer and meditation which would lead to a transformation of the psyche. It is tempting to find in this argument the seeds of Masonic symbolism.

Two boxes of largely disregarded papers purchased by J. M. Keynes from Cambridge University in 1936 revealed a side of Newton's approach to alchemy that has prompted some modern writers like Robert Lomas [5] and Michael White (6) to refer to him as '*the last of the magicians*' or '*the last sorcerer'*. For such thinkers as Newton, Harvey, Bacon, Napier and Gilbert there was always the possibility that until something was conclusively disproved there was always a chance that it might exist. This was one of the great problems of the *Age of Enlightenment*; whilst men were free to wonder and speculate they were also bound by the mysteries, beliefs, assumptions and assurances inherited from the world around them; proof could only assuage so much doubt. The vestiges of that inheritance remain; it is called 'superstition'! Therein lay the real challenge, should Utopia provide a comfortable version of the status quo or should it offer a path to enhanced self knowledge through a search and an intellectual struggle?

Man's search for Utopia has much deeper roots than the intellectual ferment of the *Age of Enlightenment* or the preservation of a comfortable *status quo*.

An early manifestation appears in '*The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor'* [7] dating from somewhere in the pre-Christian era between 1940 BC and 1640 BC. Other ideas appear in Hesiod (8th century BC) [8] where the ideal seems to be a recollection of a lost Golden Age. This prompts the thought that the quest for Utopia is something lodged deep in the human psyche. The suggestion is that the quest is less for an idyllic life of ease than a restless urge to know the unknowable. The importance of having something to occupy the mind and the imagination seems more important than physical comfort. It was not until speculative Freemasonry evolved that the idea of a personal pathway with a shared purpose offering a means to that end took shape.

What distinguished speculative Freemasonry from an array of religious paths to perfection was that it did not offer some form of tangible Heaven or Paradise at the end of the journey nor did it offer a pathway to salvation. What it offered, and still does, is a route to a deeper knowledge of self, of the world and the place of the individual within that world. The point of the spiral staircase offering five different perspectives on life is usually neglected when the ascent is being demonstrated or explained.

In his *'Republic'* Plato [9] (360BC) sets the framework for much of the thinking that was to follow; the search for a strategy by which a utopian state could be achieved. For Plato and many of those who followed him the principles were straightforward; devise an ideal society and impose upon it a regime by which the ideal can be achieved and sustained. Underlying all such approaches is a fundamental commitment to compulsion and rigorous control. The philosophical ideal has no place for the individual save as the means by which the ideal can be attained. Plato would not have objected to the opening words of the address to the Brethren:-

'as some must of necessity rule and teach, so others must, of course, learn, submit and obey'.[4]

There is no overt evidence of any form of utopian vision in the world of the medieval, operative Mason. In that world the mystical reward was the outcome of work and it is presumed, for those working on religious projects, the joy of serving God and the prospect of a pathway to heaven.

The first historical reference to '*fre-masons'* occurs in *City of London, Letter Book H* where, in 1383, John Wycliff refers to '*men of subtle craft, as fre-masons and others'*. Up to that point, or more probably up to the arrival of the Black Death in 1348/9, workers in stone had gloried in a variety of trade-specific titles. A *cementarius* was a trained and skilled layer of building blocks: a '*machun'* was a builder of garden / terrace walls, a '*biandore'* was a hand basket carrier; a '*lathomus'* was a skilled worker, probably some sort of Menatschin, or prefect or overseer; a '*majores lathomi'* was in charge of a project, a '*muratore'* specialised in walls, and so on. A team of operative masons or lodge might be able to cover up to twenty different skills or be able to 'buy in', a particular skill such as that of the '*alabasterer* 'if a particular piece of alabaster carving had to be done.[10]

By 1435 the word '*freemason*' had come into wider use and a distinction was being drawn between the skilled men and the untrained or at least, unattached 'cowboys' or 'machuns', the 'cowans' the Tyler is employed to guard against. In those early days the Tyler's principal duty was to prevent any unqualified 'machun' gaining trade secrets by eavesdropping on lodge planning meetings. Essentially the Tyler or Outer Guard was a form of counter-espionage. As timber framed buildings replaced traditional stone built dwellings and the demand for castles, abbeys and monasteries decreased so operative masonry went into a decline. It did not disappear completely there were still civic buildings to build, town and city walls to repair or extend, bridges to build or restore after flooding, stone floors, courtyards and fireplaces to create, but operative masonry was no longer the second major employer of labour.

The concept of a '*happy nowhere'* played no part in the philosophical and theological debates of the time at any level of society. Medieval philosophers discussed the link between faith and reason, the existence and simplicity of God, the purpose of theology and metaphysics and problems of knowledge, of universals and of individuation. There was but one happy place, **Heaven**! Most thinkers followed Saint Augustine when he said that he would never allow his philosophical investigations to go beyond the authority of God. For over a thousand years his views shaped Man's approach to all philosophical enquiries.

Paradoxically one fundamental aspect of this debate did relate to the later development of speculative masonry. *Hylomorphism* began to figure in philosophical discussions at the end of the twelfth century. Theorists , among them St. Augustine, who argued that primordial matter was the First Cause of the Universe, led an attempt to explain the relationship between matter and form [11]. The argument presumed that primordial matter was the most perfect and complete form of indeterminateness. God, the Supreme Being, was deemed to be the most perfect form of determinateness, the highest and most complete form of reality. It was, or had been, God's work to impart actuality and usefulness to primordial matter. This in turn prompted the idea that 'things' are a compound of substance and shape; in simple terms a statue was deemed to be a compound of its base material and the form sculpted from it. This simplified explanation acknowledges but ignores what Aristotle held to be the four basic principles of 'Being'. For Aristotle '*Being*' was about Matter and Form. For something to *'Be'* Aristotle argued for the existence of four causes:-

The material cause of being was the material from which the statue was sculpted

The formal cause was the idea in the sculptor's mind

The efficient cause was the agent of creation, the sculptor

The final cause was the purpose for which the statue was made, money or status.

It was this type of Aristotelian logic that led hylomorphic thinkers to ponder the mysteries of the achievements of the medieval operatives. Hylomorphist thinkers began to wonder how it was that cold, inanimate stone, created in that form by the intelligence and skill of the Supreme Being could be fashioned into such marvellous testimonies of faith. They concluded that whilst God had worked through the hands of stone masons there was, even so, something intrinsically special about stone that allowed it to respond to the efforts of man in such a splendid manner. It was this line of thought that prompted a progression from the idea that God was working through the hand of the operative mason to a consideration of the tools he employed that ultimately gave a symbolic meaning to the Working Tools. From the explanations of those Working Tools with their emphasis upon personal conduct and development emerges the pathway to a Masonic Utopia.

Had an operative mason in 1340 been concerned with such abstract matters as Utopia he might have constructed a society closely resembling the world of the operative lodge. Masons were bound to their lodge as 'free men', they worked at their chosen skills to the glory of God, they were under no work or service obligations to some distant lord; they could sell their skills or any produce they might raise from a piece of land, they could hold public office, give evidence in civil or criminal cases, set up their children in a trade and allow them to marry for love, the individual might seek education for himself or his family; perhaps most important of all he could move about without let or hindrance. The obligations to his lodge and the requirements laid upon him as he discharged his duties, embodied in what are now called '*The Ancient Charges'* were essentially the rules and conditions under which he worked. They must have seemed no more onerous than a guarantee of employment. The lodge was as ordered and disciplined a society as any abbey or community of monks and doubtless as much a prey to personal tensions and anxieties as any Browning imagined in his *Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister* [12]. Life may not have been soft or easy but the mason was among fellows he could trust, who lived by the codes he respected and seldom had to fear for either his food or his wages. Whatever in-fighting occurred about contracts, their delivery and the details of the project happened above his level of concern. He could see and take pride in the fruits of his labours.

Beliefs about the possibility of achieving a utopian society or some form of an almost utopian social structure began to take a more clearly defined shape during the *Age of Enlightenment* as perceptive observers noted and began to ponder, the customs of native peoples they encountered. From those observations and musings they began to weave the myth of the noble savage [13]. During his service in North America with Montcalm in the 1750's Bougainville (1729-1811) developed an admiration for the social fabric of the 'people of the longhouse' or the Hodenosaunee; the five tribes of the Mohawks, Oneidas, Senecas, Onondagas and Cayugas [14]. Under no illusions about their fundamental savagery he admired their democratic form of organisation, the absence of any formal state apparatus and the virtual gender free character of their society.

To a European accustomed to the paraphernalia of a cumbersome state machinery he marvelled at a society without a state, a communal economic system that functioned without coercion within a framework of remarkable political sophistication. There is no record of his having observed any form of peer group criticism or social disapproval that is known to have existed among other primitive peoples. In the 1760's whilst serving as a naval officer he explored the islands of the Pacific and found among the islanders a not dissimilar world that was to lay the foundations for the enduring myth of the noble savage. These ideas certainly became the talk of the French Court and beyond [14].

Charles Fournier [16] (1772 – 1837) created a world in which all passions were deemed to be God given and therefore to be cherished and indulged. To allow the complete array of human passions to range freely and completely towards their total realisation and fulfilment, a complicated system of checks and balances, meetings and monitors was to be established. These systems would seek to match taste with taste, inclination with inclination until the world revolved in '**Harmony**' with no person feeling excluded and no passion left unsated. Fournier's theory was based upon an assumption that civilised society creates its own evils by stifling passions deemed to be 'uncivilised'. Such evils could be resolved by placing individuals in situations where their 'God given' inclinations can be given free rein. In this way the two-thirds of male children whom, he presumed, 'enjoy playing in filth'; would be employed as latrine or street cleaners; those with bloodthirsty tendencies would become slaughter men and so forth. In this way a world would be created where human activity would begin in order, be conducted in peace and culminate in harmony, (an almost Masonic vision). What it lacked was any form of personal challenge or development; the emphasis was wholly upon personal gratification with scant thought given to how the initial identifications were to be carried out. People would in some way gravitate towards those areas of life and work within the community where they felt most comfortable and so a utopian society based on *'harmony'* would prevail. Flawed though his argument undoubtedly was Fournier is inching towards the notion of an idealised society in which there is an early echo of Freemasonry. He would have been very comfortable with the words, *'may our labours thus begun in order be conducted in peace and closed in harmony'* for that was what his utopia was intended to deliver*.*

From a Masonic standpoint a key document; *'New Atlantis'* [17], had *appeared* in 1627. Written by Francis Bacon this early science-fiction novel sets out to show how science will transform the world. Science is the major intellectual enterprise of the Bensalemites who are presented as exemplary citizens, devout Christians, heterosexual and much given to ritual and ceremonial, (the first Freemasons?). These elements were included to allay fears, already nascent in the seventeenth century, that science was the enemy of social order and godliness.

For early Freemasons seeking to pursue their perfectly proper researches into the '*hidden mysteries of nature and science*' [4] such popular attitudes laid the foundations for subsequent hostility, suspicion and ridicule based on ignorance and fear. The utopian theme is hidden in the name of the group, 'Ben' or '*son of*' and 'Salem', a synonym for Zion, the citadel of Jerusalem or '*the world to come*': quite simply the Bensalemites were '*sons of the world to come*'. That process had gained considerable momentum by the time William Preston began to advance his vision of freemasonry.

The traditional history of Freemasonry as set out by William Preston in his '*Illustrations of Freemasonry*' [18] argues that the pre-Roman Druids possessed the secrets of Pythagoras. Several noble Romans who held dominion over the English were deemed to have ranked themselves as patrons and protectors of the Craft. Well before the Romans left Carausius became the dominant 'local' leader: he was, effectively, a usurping German Emperor whose strength lay with his control of crews of barbarian sailors [19] According to Preston Carausius '*acquired the love and esteem of the most enlightened part of his subjects*' by '*assuming the character of a Mason* [18].

From that point on the contrived history becomes ever more fanciful until it nears Preston's own times when he could write from knowledge. On this early history it is difficult to quarrel with Plot when he described the early history of the Craft, as it was presented in his day, '*...as bad as this history of the Craft itself, than which there is nothing I ever met with more false or incoherent*' [20].

Preston was not overtly seeking a Utopia but rather extolling the virtues of the Craft by demonstrating that Monarchs throughout the ages '*have patronised our mysteries and joined in our assemblies*'. [4]

Yet what he does in the opening pages of Book 1 is to set out the means by which the mind of a man can be influenced by his surroundings. He builds an image that Richard Jeffries was to re-create in 1885 in '*After London*' [21] when some unspecified disaster had wiped out mankind.

'*Were a man placed in a beautiful garden, would not his mind be affected with exquisite delight on a calm survey of its rich collections? Would not the groves, the grottoes, the artful wilds, the flowery parterres, the winding streams, the whole variegated scene, awaken his sensibility and inspire his soul with the most exalted ideas?*' [18]

This idea is developed into an argument in favour of friendship:-

that '*source of universal benevolence*' which, among other virtues '*inspires that public spirit and heroic ardour that enables us to support a good cause and risk our lives in its defence*'. (In 1804 the nation was at war with France!) '*in more tranquil scenes we behold it* (the friendship of brotherhood) *calm and moderate, burning with an even glow, improving the soft hours of peace and heightening the relish for virtue, In those happy moments contracts are formed, societies are instituted and the vacant hours of life are employed in the cultivation of social and polished manners*'. (18)

Preston's Utopia was to have as its core, universal friendship, or world brotherhood since that is how he develops his argument. Such a force would create a polished, civilised and thoughtful society striving to improve the lot of all men:-

'the true mason is a citizen of the world and his philanthropy extends to all the human race.' [18]

From a Masonic point of view Preston's writings seem to mark the first significant, lay presentation of the view that a personal Utopia might lie within the process of a search or arise from rigorous self examination. Beyond that, such a practice carried out with like-minded fellows, could bring a universal benefit. His thoughts mark the first tentative steps towards an ideal, or utopian, world based on Masonic principles.

This line of reasoning drew upon earlier hylomorphic thinking prompted by the study of fossils found in stone. Seeking an explanation for the presence of these proofs of past life the primitive speculatives, or natural philosophers, concluded that they were the remains of waste material discarded by the Almighty as He created Eden (See Genesis Chap.2 v4-17). This in turn led to the presumption that if the secrets hidden in such stone could be unlocked Man would find the key to a new Golden Age, an age of perfection and happiness which could be shared with all mankind. It was to this enquiry that early speculative Masons turned their minds. Their perception of Utopia was a vision based on the Biblical account of Eden which could be restored if only the key, the lost secret, could be found. What better to unlock the mystery of stone than the '*genuine secrets of a master mason*'? The unfortunate legacy of St. Augustine's reluctance to question ideas that seemed to challenge the presumed authority of God did not permit this line of reasoning to move comfortably forward. That constraint was removed during the Age of Enlightenment as men became both more willing and better equipped to examine the physical world and ponder its metaphysical dimension.

In his *'Elements of Architecture'* published in1624 Henry Wootton had wondered about the innate mystery of stone when he wrote:-

'...ordinarie stone, without any garnish of sculpture doe yet ravish the beholder by a secret harmonie'. [22]This view was developed when he argued that operative masons should speculate upon the reasons why their work produces:

'.. a graceful and harmonious contentment....which speculation, though it may appear to vulgar artisans perhaps too subtle and too sublime... commandeth in an Architect a philosophical spirit that is no superficial and floating artificer but a diver into causes'.(22)

By 1624 much about the world was in a state of rapid and sometimes violent flux. Europe was being torn apart by the Thirty Years War, Galileo was exploring the mysteries of the universe, the New World was adding an additional dimension to trade and thought, Kepler was shaping the laws of planetary motion, Napier had given the world logarithms, Harvey had described the circulation of the blood and philosophy was caught up in the debate between the *medievalists* and their search for 'why?' and the *modernists* who were disposed to ask 'how?' Henry Wootton's reflections on the nature of stone suggest how this debate influenced a consideration of the metaphysical dimension of stone masonry and led him to hint at a utopian trend in operative thinking pre-dating the initiation of Elias Ashmole in October 1646.

In 1659 the word 'architect' carried the definition of *'one who defines and frames any complex structure, as described by the words 'the creator',* linking the language of the First Degree very firmly to the language of the age. By the same token it also urges speculation as a key to knowledge.

Towards the end of the 17th century and in the opening years of the 18th a subtle change seems to have taken place among philosophers speculating on the nature of Utopia. Previous writers had devised an ideal social framework and then designed strategies to create and enforce it. The newly emergent theme asked effectively, 'What are the obstacles to the creation of a perfect society?'

De Foigny(1640-1692) expounded a near Masonic viewpoint in '*A New Discovery of Terra Incognita Australis'* [23]. He addressed the question *'How can men live in brotherly accord?'* He concluded that it would be necessary to remove those fundamental elements of discord; possessions, money and women. After a lengthy analysis of how this could be achieved, which, in part, owes much to Genesis, he concluded that mercy and joy are as deeply rooted in human passions as are vice and lust. Pure reason is as incompatible with happiness and love as are the animal appetites he condemns.

In such logic lie the roots of Freemasonry as a moral code by which to live. Here are to be found the first stirrings of *prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice* [4]. De Foigny's cry is that man must know himself [4] and curb his animal appetites or '*passions'* if he is to find a pathway to happiness and brotherly love. His use of the word '*passion*' reflects his training as a monk where passion signified agony: passion as love first appeared in 1588 in Shakespeare's *'Titus Andronicus'* : when de Foigny was writing it had come to mean a strong liking of the sort that prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice must control if a man is to achieve his true destiny and rise above his baser instincts.

Emanuel Swedenborg (1688 – 1772) was a distinguished Swedish mystic who, after a varied and successful career as a scientist underwent a religious crisis in which he claimed to have been given a direct insight into the spiritual world. Swedenborg argued that humans exist simultaneously in both the physical and spiritual worlds but that only the memory of the spiritual world survives after death. The core of Swedenborg's thesis was that God, or the Supreme Being is neither transcendental nor immanent or 'out there' but within ourselves. This was also the case with Heaven and Hell [24] This view accords neatly with the thrust of the Charge after the Raising in the Third Degree and attracted popular support among his followers in London who, in 1787, established the Church of the New Jerusalem which spread worldwide advancing the creed of Swedenborgianism. Its fundamental tenet was that redemption is concerned solely with personal striving in the spiritual life following the guidance set down in Holy Writ and allying that search with charity towards all. Freemasonry has never offered redemption but its main quest has always been for keys to self knowledge, personal improvement and betterment in thought, word and deed. Consider the import of the words spoken during the explanation of the three Great Lights to the Master Elect. As a well read, thinking man, Preston could not have been unaware of Swedenborg's writings. Indeed what can be discerned in Preston's work is a thread which suggests that the lessons of Freemasonry as exemplified by the explanations of the Working Tools and elsewhere serve to fashion that memory of the spiritual world which Swedenborg believed survives death. That thread surfaces in Preston's notes on a Masonic Funeral Service where he notes '..*his immortal soul will then partake of the joys which have been prepared for the righteous from the beginning of the world'* [18]

There was another undercurrent at work in society. It was a stirring of awareness that might almost be called the growth of social consciousness. It shows clearly through a poem entitled '*The Choice'* by John Pomfret (1667-1702) [25]. The poem extols the virtues of a genteel existence and has been described as *'A familiar exercise, adapted to the taste of the time'* [26]. It contains a rural idyll, a wish to be able to practise charity; prudent conduct, temperance, fortitude, justice within an overarching mantle of fairness, good male friends, intelligent conversation and an end which is effectively to live respected and die regretted. The poem may reflect the '*taste of the time'* but if it does the popular taste was for the fundamental principles of Freemasonry and those underpinned a utopian ideal. This goes some way to explain the growth of interest in something that extended beyond the rise of groups with an intellectual passion for enquiry or common commercial interests and shows how Preston's belief that Masonry was both universal and philanthropic was able to take root. Pomfret's *'Choice'* marks a point at which the pursuit of intellectual advancement merges with a wish to spread the benefits of the good life as widely as possible.

There were other strands in social philosophy which indicated how levels of awareness were changing. In 1770 the anonymous writer of *'An account of the General Dispensary for the Relief of the Poor'* wrote '*the poor are a large as well as useful part of the community... they have a just claim to the protection of the rich. If affluence and independence could universally prevail, the benevolent would not experience the in expressible pleasure of relieving the distressed'.* Such sentiments are not far removed from certain parts of the Charge after Initiation and the Address to the Worshipful Master on his Installation

The extension of those benefits did not, however, extend to the female elements of society. Eighteenth century women poets show little interest in such matters and frequently little love for their place in society. Anne Finch, Countess of Winchester penned a '*Nocturnal Reverie'* in which she cited the beauties of night and closes with an almost Masonic sentiment *'Or pleasures, seldom reached, again pursued';* hinting at a quasi-Masonic quest for certainty and truth that will forever elude her. The counterpoise to such thoughts is a steady lamentation of a woman's lot and the denunciation of men and their lifestyle. Elizabeth Thomas's bitter and damning *'The True Effigies of a Certain Squire'* contains a line which 'says it all', *'Th' emetic's strong I sicken at the sight'.* In the light of such sentiments the words of the Entered Apprentice's Song

'***We're true and sincere, and just to the fair,***
They'll trust us on any occasion,
No mortal can more, the Ladies adore,
Than a Free and an accepted Mason'

Sound arrogant, hypocritical and detached from reality*.* Perchance the 'popular taste' was not as widely held as the *Cambridge History of English and American Literature* would have us believe. This may be unfair, the early Freemasons may have been genuinely '*true and sincere and just to the fair.* Yet it is difficult to deny that respect and equality are still not universally granted to 'the fair' nor are they accepted accepted as the norm. The early view of utopia had little to offer womankind.

That the male concern with the quest for a 'good life' was a thought present in the minds of many thinkers emerges through '*Rasselas'* [27] by Samuel Johnson. Written in 1759 it tells how a *'Prince of Abissinia'* bored with the absolute tranquillity of his perfect, sheltered, utopian existence seeks to find true happiness because the 'perfect happiness' he enjoys offers no intellectual challenge; '*The pursuit of happiness is one thing – a necessary endeavour – obtaining it is something else'.* Freemasons seek intellectual truth '*even to the throne of God himself'* but in the knowledge that the answer will always elude them. The profit lies in the quest and what it teaches the seeker about himself. Just as Rasselas sought intellectual challenges Freemasons are urged *'to pursue their researches into the hidden mysteries of nature and science'* [4].

If indeed this were the popular 'taste of the time' why did Freemasonry's vision fail to strike a more sympathetic chord with a wider sector of the population? Why did Freemasonry's dream of utopia fail to enthuse the public? The answers are various and complex.

The medieval operative mason was not a popular person. He lived in, but apart from a community, he owed no duty to any lord other than his Lodge, he was free of the dues and tithes under which the locals laboured, he was paid wages which could be spent locally forcing up prices and distorting the value of goods in the barter chain, he was *different* in an age when conformity was a key word in society.

The suspicions originating from the days of the early operatives, that they plotted in cartels to fix prices and standardise costs, lingered well after the actual circumstances had changed.

The merits and purpose of scientific enquiry that challenged entrenched views frightened those influential orders of society for whom such things were either unthinkable or blasphemous.

Freemasons met in secret; *ergo* they were up to no good. Secrecy was tantamount to conversations with the Devil in an age when the daily round was bedevilled by malicious and mischievous spirits and the night populated by ghosts and the menace of a spirit world. This was embellished by a spate of allegations involving links between members of the Craft and the world of faerie. During the years between 1676 and about 1770 this particular source of mischief was nurtured and flourished before it eventually faded. Beliefs based on over a century of ignorance and wilful misunderstandings are difficult to dispel.

They were exclusive and guarded jealously their great secret, charity. In an age lacking all forms of state aid for the unfortunate, a group of men dedicated to looking after their own were at best anti-social and at worst parasitical.

Their open mindedness on matters of faith marked them as a threat to the established religions.

Their fundamental vision lay beyond the compass of the 'ordinary' man, the poorly educated minds of men struggling to survive in a demanding world.

Even the words of popular Masonic songs sung during the festive board in the late 18th Century, could, if overheard by a servant or tapster lend themselves to misrepresentation.

Inevitably these dreamers of dreams attracted much irrational and unreasonable odium

In 1729 Francis Drake, J.G.W. advised Masons to avoid respond to all slanders, criticisms and calumnies [28]. This may have avoided a public slanging match but it served only to widen the gap between comprehension and belief and add fuel to the flames of suspicion.

Set against this backdrop coupled with the difficulty of 'selling' the higher principles of evolving Freemasonry to a populace still largely illiterate and bound to the daily trials of earning a living it is easy to see why Freemasonry became the province of the leisured intelligentsia. This, in its turn, helped to move the Masonic concept away from Pomfret's *'taste of the time'*. Yet the vision of actions that would benefit the world as a whole persisted. Preston in 1775 was able to plead for a world where '*The universal principles of the art unite, in one indissoluble bond of affection, men of the most opposite tenets, of the most distant countries and the most contrary opinions; so that in every nation a Mason may find a friend and in every climate a home* [4]. In these arguments he advances a vision of what could be; what should be

Early Masonic songs refer to each Brother being expected to tell a story or sing a song possibly suggesting that the Order was already dividing between the serious thinkers who were disposed to seek for the light with a view to improving the lot of mankind generally and those who saw it as a form of social club or benefit society. The former group moved towards a form of philosophical society where papers were read and discussed: the latter moved towards a quasi social, benefits club approach with a focus principally upon mutual support and brotherhood. This may be an unfair comment since various writers of the period 1770 to 1840 refer to occasions when Masons work in a serious manner before joining in the cheerful festivities that follow. [29] Many contemporary Lodges work seriously 'upstairs' and enjoy convivial, even musical festive boards afterwards.

The changes that were shaping 19th century life and work were mirrored among Masons. In an increasingly prosperous but risk based industrial society the Lodge offered opportunities for business and political acquaintance, it became an agency for what, in contemporary society, would be called networking. The tradition of the travelling journeyman operative became revitalised through the practice of visiting. The framework of the Ancient Charges became the philosophical framework of modern Masonry and the emerging awareness of philanthropy gave a wider dimension to the concept of charity.

Inevitably fragmentation occurred. The division into Ancients and Moderns was healed by the emergence of the United Grand Lodge leading to an attempt to standardise ritual and practice. European groups like the 'Conspiracy of Equals', the Carbonari and the Illuminati professed ideas that a modern Mason would recognise but allowed political factors to shape their presentation to and role in society and by so doing attracted new forms of criticism and persecution. From this followed a mistrust of Freemasonry as a subversive force in society.

A similar development was taking place in France where Claude-Henri de Saint Simon [30] (1760-1825) was exploring the way in which a science of man and society could be fashioned. Ridiculed and persecuted in his day largely because of the way in which he illustrated his theories; after Waterloo it was **not** a wise move to propose the unification of England and France nor was it wise to identify the aristocracy as drones after the restoration of a monarchy. Saint Simon sought to create a positive science of society based on reason. His ardent plea for a society based on reason that respected work, sought a terrestrial morality and regarded all aspects of human endeavour as being worthy of equal respect suggested that Utopia was not a dream but a perfectly rational reality. These are fundamentally sound, Masonic criteria. He went further than Pomfret who wrote about generalities built round the benevolence of his own social group by steering a course towards an idealization of brotherly feeling. His ideas may have preceded those of Karl Marx but he was seeking his vision of an ideal world based on individual equality and reason at a time when Freemasonry was beginning to offer a pathway to such a world also based on equality and reason.

Throughout the western world there arose movements seeking to establish utopian communities. In England these ranged from genuinely philanthropic ventures like Ham Green and the other early ventures set up by Robert Owen to vaguely religious communities with links to fringe religious groups and communities resembling contemporary eco-dwellers. Each was seeking a utopian world fashioned in its own image. Each was intrinsically selfish or at best self-interested. Yet Robert Owen's vision of a utopian society [31] with his emphasis on human perfectibility by instruction and example, his dismissal of sectarian difficulties and his emphasis on equality was moving into a quasi-Masonic field before he moved into the realm of political philosophising. It even attracted the opposition of the established Churches on grounds very similar to those used to oppose Freemasonry.

 In England the links between the upper classes and the church through the practice of advowson, the Catholic revival of mid-century and the emergence of Nonconformism left little room to tackle perceived threats from organisations like Freemasonry. That changed as Freemasonry spread across the Empire and by its readiness to accept men of all faiths was perceived to constitute a threat to the plans for hegemony of the various Churches. In this way the pursuit of a Masonic Utopia, a vision of a world of genuine equality based on brotherly love, relief and truth, found itself threatened by the very agencies whose finest principles it espoused. Yet England bred none of the rabid anti-Masonic movements like those in France prompted by Leo Taxil, originally designed not to shame Freemasonry but to embarrass the Roman Catholic Church. Or any of the movements in America which followed the Morgan murder although the activities of Jack the Ripper did attract Masonic slurs. On the other hand the Craft did attract a substantial body of ridicule criticism and fantastic invention.

The Craft also seems to have attracted some interest among the socially aware elements of nineteenth century society. The Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes (it had no Royal warrant nor was it antediluvian) took shape after 1820 growing from a drinking club based on a gathering of theatrical employees who were envious of a Masonic lodge, the Drury Lane Playhouse Lodge V catering for actors. Their traditional ballad was entitled '*We'll Chase the Buffalo*'; their principles were non-denominational and non-sectarian, their aim was support for widows and orphans. Although their organisation, terminology and language suggest a Masonic influence, there is no evidence of a broader vision and no sign of a greater goal. A rudimentary knowledge of Freemasonry may have had some influence on the early lists of members which claimed, as 'Buffs', Noah, Solomon, Sampson, Brutus, William the Conqueror, Richard 1st and Sir John Falstaff among others; just as William Preston concocted a spurious pedigree for Freemasonry in the 1770's. If the account of a 'Buffs' initiation ceremony as recorded in Pierce Egan's *'Adventures of Tom and Jerry'* (1821) bears any resemblance at all to reality there was a marked lack of dignity and decorum among its members.

The same could be said of the Order of the Moose, initially also a drinking club, which was founded in America in 1888 and reached England in 1922. Again the focus was charitable care for widows and orphans and the provision of support for community ventures but without a greater vision. It was as if good deeds brought their own reward. There were other, 'lookalike' clubs such as the Elks and Eagles all with broadly similar aims and all lacking a broader vision. The Victorian sailor also cherished a utopian vision. This was known as '*Fiddler's Green*', a safe anchorage, a place where mirth abounded, a fiddler never stopped playing for hornpipe dancers and unlimited quantities of grog and tobacco were on hand. This was nothing more than a nautical version of the American hobo's vision of 'The Big Rock Candy Mountain'.

The 18th century soldier had a more prosaic view of utopian happiness:-

From all long marches on rainy days
And from stoppages out of our pay
And from the washerwoman's bills on our clothes
Good Lord deliver us

From mounting guard when the snow lies deep
And from standing sentry when others sleep
And from barrack beds where lice and bugs do creep
Good Lord deliver us

From all bridewell cages and blackholes
And officers' canes with their halberd poles
And the nine-tailed cat that oppresses our souls
Good Lord deliver us.

Such utopian visions were simply an escape from hard times. They were dreams of future ease and happiness unlikely ever to be achieved; it was about 'longing for' not working towards. There was no vision that beckoned; no incentive to search and progress, no charitable concerns.

All of these imitators offered nothing more than an escape from a hard life. None offered the challenge to improve one's-self and so move society forward. This was very much at odds with the vision of Rev. Dr. Dodd who, in 1845, described Masonry as '*an institution founded on eternal reason and truth whose deep basis is the civilisation of mankind'* [29]. For the reverend gentleman a Masonic Utopia would be achieved when '*the mournful investigation of a brother's wants pleading pity melts the eye and generous compassion swells the feeling breast; whilst amidst the cheerful exertions of inoffensive mirth, of heart enlarging friendly communication, reflection shall be enabled to look back with pleasure and impartial conscience shall find nothing to disapprove.'* [29]

What did appear to happen during this period of evolution was that a distinction between spiritual and material became apparent. That is not to suggest that there were no material benefits to be derived from Freemasonry, 'networking' must have offered some rewards but rather that it possessed a higher vision than that possessed by its imitators. By stressing equality to eliminate sources of envy and disharmony; by excluding women, by shunning religious and sectarian debate the Victorian Mason came close to achieving the vision of de Foigny and the world of Bacon's Bensalemites.

Modern writers on Utopia divide between schools of thought represented by thinkers like the physicist John Freeman Dyson [32] and dreamers like Richard Jefferys [18]. Dyson envisages a universe dominated and populated by man, the characteristic scenario of much science fiction. In this vision he postulates the presumed benefits of human society shorn of its failings filling the universe with light. Essentially this appears to be a reworking of the ideas of Francis Bacon as advanced in *'New Atlantis'.* Surely only Freemasonry has the philosophical wherewithal to sustain this vision?

The alternative is that advanced by thinkers influenced by the writings of Richard Jefferys. The skill of Jefferys in depicting the beauties of the natural and rural world fostered a school of utopians who sought a wild, beautiful green Utopia in which man was a blemish on the face of the Earth. Whilst Jefferys was a writer on natural history of some merit it is difficult to believe that what his followers advocate as a 'green utopia' is what Jefferys would have subscribed to. His *'After London'* argues against his own attributed thesis in so far as it postulates a world in which nature, far from existing as an idyllic greenness, is 'red in tooth and claw' and dominates a tangled wilderness the subsequent re-settlement of which is, broadly, an account of the early historical geography of our island. In a sense the initial essay '*After London'* is joined to a sequel '*Wild England'* which becomes a form of science-fiction novel based upon ideas that are poorly thought through but well written. This is a strangely confused view for a naturalist, if it was ever intended as a serious view. And begs the philosophical question 'If no man is there to perceive it how can we know it exists and even if it does will it have a point?' Is this 'wilderness' view of Utopia any more than the quest for a mythical Golden Age which once may have been and which started with Hesiod and was hinted at by Preston? History teaches otherwise.

It is possible to argue that the vision which drove the earliest speculatives with their quest for the pathway to perfection and a perfect world has now faded leaving each Mason to find his own Utopia within the tenets and guiding principles of the Craft. The challenge is to see beyond the tenure of an office and the quest for promotion and to embrace Freemasonry as a code by which to live. The true Mason is asked to look into his own soul and measure himself against promises made to himself at the various stages of his Masonic career. Do that and a personal Utopia beckons. If enough Masons do it a brighter future is possible. Subscribe to the view that Masonry is nothing if it is not visible in our lives and work, strive to make it so and the dream of a Masonic Utopia might become a reality. There is little doubt that living by Freemasonry's moral code carries the individual a long way towards the realisation of a personal Utopia. Perhaps that is the best we can hope for, although an evening spent in Lodge among like-minded Masons can offer a tantalising prospect of what could be. Similarly it is possible to observe the transformation that the Masonic experience can achieve in individuals and know that the Craft still has much to offer the individual and society.

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Dear Bro Mike,

Just a short note to thank you for your paper 'Freemasonry and Utopia' which all the members of the Committee found extremely interesting and well written

The Editorial Committee of the Lodge has met and it has been decided that we will publish the paper in either AQC 125 0r AQC 126 depending on the space available.

I also would like congratulate you personally and offer you my best wishes for your future research. I will be looking forward to reading some more of your work.

Yours sincerely and fraternally

Gordon Davie

Secretary QC Lodge No.2076