

Chevalier Andrew Michael Ramsay and the Knights Templar

Shortly after I was raised to the sublime degree of Master Mason, I read the book, *Born in Blood*, by our late Brother John G. Robinson. In his book Brother Robinson told the fascinating and engaging story of the Knights Templar, and what he perceived was a close relationship between that Order of crusader knights and the forms and ceremonies of Freemasonry. I found Brother Robinson's case persuasive, and was satisfied, after reading *Born in Blood*, that Freemasonry more or less came from the Knights Templar.

Then I joined the Philalethes Society, an international Masonic research society. One of the benefits of membership in that organization is its listserv, that is, an e-mail discussion group whereby one sends e-mail to the listserv and it is disseminated to everyone who subscribes to the group, not unlike Yahoo Groups, and thereby creates an international discussion of Masonic matters and topics. When I encountered their first discussion of the Knights Templar since my joining the group, I discovered that very few of the scholars on that list gave credence to Robinson's theories, nor did any of the Philalethes Brethren who were active on that list believe that Masonry came from the Knights Templar.

I recall one Brother on the list asserted that we know when the notion of a connection between Masonry and the Knights Templar started, by whom, and for what purpose. The notion was started, claimed this Brother, by Chevalier Andrew Michael Ramsay, in Paris in 1737 in a lecture which was published in 1741 under the title *Discourse Pronounced at the Reception of a Freemason*.¹ This Brother claimed it was done for the purpose of encouraging Catholics to become Masons.

Leaving aside the merits of the theories of John G. Robinson, Brothers Knight and Lomas (who wrote *The Hiram Key*), Baigent and Leigh (who wrote *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*), and Dan Brown (who wrote *The Da Vinci Code*), here is the story of Chevalier Andrew Michael Ramsay and his famous lecture that, according to some, is the spark that ignited the fire that led to the founding of the Masonic Knights Templar and, some argue, the French *Hauts Grades*, or "High Degrees" which ultimately evolved into the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite.

Ramsay was born in Ayr, Scotland, between 1680 and 1688. He entered the University of Edinburgh at the age of 14. In 1706 he left for Europe. In 1710 he became impressed with the Quietist philosophy and, though previously a Calvinist, joined the Roman Catholic Church.² (Quietism states that man's highest perfection consists of a self-annihilation, and subsequent absorption, of the soul into the Divine, even during the present life. In this way, the mind is withdrawn from worldly interests to passively and constantly contemplate God.)³

In Paris, in 1723, he became the tutor to the young Duc de Chateau-Thierry, and the Regent, Philippe d'Orleans, conferred upon Ramsay the Order of St. Lazarus, which bestowed on Ramsay the title of "Chevalier," or Knight.

In 1724, in Rome, he became the tutor of Bonnie Prince Charlie and his brother, and was their tutor for 15 months. In 1725, interestingly, he was offered the position of tutor to the son of the King of England, but refused, saying that "he was a Roman Catholic and not suited to a place in a Protestant king's household."⁴

In 1727 he gained literary fame when he published *The Travels of Cyrus*. He moved to England in 1728, and the London Evening Post for March 17, 1729 reports that "On Monday night last at the Horn Lodge in the Palace Yard, Westminster (whereof his Grace the Duke of Richmond is Master) there was a numerous appearance of persons of distinction at which time... the Chevalier Ramsay" (along with a number of other distinguished persons listed) "...were admitted members of the Ancient Society of Free and Accepted Masons." In that same year, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society. In 1730 he received his Doctor of Civil Law Degree from Oxford University, becoming the first Roman Catholic to receive a degree at Oxford since the English Reformation of 1535.

Ramsay returned to France where, on March 20, 1737, as Grand Chancellor or Grand Orator of some Masonic body in Paris, Ramsay delivered, or at least prepared, a discourse or lecture or charge to be given as part of a Masonic initiation. According to Coil's Encyclopedia, "it is the earliest known exposition of the alleged connection between Freemasonry and the Knights Templar or other Crusaders, the theme which formed the basis for the later *Hauts Grades* (or "High Degrees"). The full text of the lecture is printed in Gould's *History of Freemasonry*. What follows is Coil's paraphrase of the lecture from which, according to Coil, "the general sense and effect of the discourse can be better obtained than from the too ornate language of the author."

"The noble ardour which you, gentlemen, evince to enter into the most noble and very illustrious order of Freemasons, is a certain proof that you already possess all the qualities necessary to become members, that is, humanity, pure morals, inviolable secrecy and a taste for the fine arts."

He continued: "The world is nothing but a huge republic, of which every nation is a family and every individual a child. Our Society was established to revive and spread these essential maxims. We desire to reunite all men, not only by love of the fine arts, but by the principles of virtue, science, and religion, whereby the interests of the Fraternity shall become those of the whole human race and whence all nations will draw knowledge, and their subjects will cherish one another, without renouncing their own country. The Grand Masters of Germany, Italy,

England, and elsewhere have arranged for the publication of a Universal Dictionary of the arts and sciences, excepting theology and politics, and the work is already begun in London. Our ancestors, the Crusaders, desired thus to unite in one Fraternity the individuals of all nations, and we owe it to them to carry out the project. Our ancestors, the Crusaders, desired to change a sad, savage, and misanthropic philosophy into one of innocent pleasures, agreeable music, pure joy, and moderate gaiety. Our secrets are the words of war which the Crusaders used to distinguish their companions and to detect Saracen foes. Our founders were not simple workers in stone, nor yet curious geniuses; they were not only skilled architects, engaged in the construction of material temples, but also religious and warrior princes who designed to enliven, edify and protect the living Temples of the Most High. The Crusaders vowed to restore the Temple of the Christians in the Holy Land. They agreed upon several ancient signs and symbolic words, and the promise to keep them secret was a bond to unite Christians of all nationalities in one fraternity. Our Order then made union with the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, hence, the name, Lodges of St. John. This union was made after the example of the Israelites in the erection of the Second Temple, who, while they handled the trowel and mortar with one hand, in the other, they held the sword and buckler. Our Order, therefore, was founded in remote antiquity and renewed in the Holy Land. Returning from Palestine, the kings, princes, and lords, established lodges, first, in Germany, Italy, Spain, France, and, thence, in Scotland, because of the close alliance between the French and the Scotch. James, Lord Steward of Scotland, was Grand Master at Kilwinning in 1286. Prince Edward (Edward I), son of Henry III of England, brought his defeated troops back from the eighth and last Crusade and established them in a colony in England, and declared himself protector, whereupon, this Fraternity took the name, Freemasons. Since that time, England has been the seat of the Order, but the religious discord which tore Europe in the 16th century caused our Order to degenerate from the nobility of its origin. The rites are changed, disguised, and suppressed. From the British Isles, the Royal Art is now repassing to France, which being one of the most spiritual in Europe will become center of the Order. She will clothe our work, our statutes, and our customs with grace, delicacy, and good taste, essential qualities of the Order of which the basis is wisdom, strength, and beauty."

"Yes, Sirs, the famous festivals of Ceres at Eleusis, of Isis in Egypt, of Minerva at Athens, of Urania amongst the Phoenicians, of Diana in Scythia, were connected with ours. In those places mysteries were celebrated which arrested many vestiges of the ancient religion of Noah and the Patriarchs. They concluded with banquets and libations where neither the impertinence nor excess were known into which the heathen gradually fell. The source of these infamies was the admission to the nocturnal assemblies of persons of both sexes in contravention of the primitive usages. It is in order to prevent similar abuse that women are excluded from our Order. We are not so unjust as to regard the fair sex as incapable of keeping a secret. But their presence might insensibly corrupt the purity of our maxims and manners."⁵

It is not certain whether Ramsay ever delivered this lecture. On March 20, 1737, the day before the lecture was to be delivered, Ramsay wrote a note to the Prime Minister to the King of France, Cardinal Fleury, asking the Cardinal to give his support to the Society of Freemasons. The note

stated "As I am to read my discourse tomorrow in a general assembly of the Order and to hand it on Monday to the examiners of the *Chancellorle* [censors of the press], I pray your Excellency to return it to me tomorrow before mid-day by express messenger." On March 22, the day after the Masonic meeting, Ramsay wrote "I learn that the assemblies of the Freemasons displease your Excellency. I have never frequented them except with a view of spreading maxims which would by degrees render incredulity ridiculous, vice odious, and ignorance shameful. I am persuaded that if men of your Excellency's choice were introduced to head these assemblies, they would become very useful to religion, the state and literature, etc." According to Coil, Fleury wrote in pencil in the margin of that letter "The King does not wish it."

In response to this, Ramsay may not have actually delivered his *Discourse*, and nothing more was heard of Ramsay during the remaining 6 years of his life. After his death, his wife and friends edited and published his finest work, *The Philosophical Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion, unfolded in Geometrical Order*, in his words, "a history of the human mind in all ages, nations and religions concerning the most divine and important truths."

Coil opines that "No other Freemason ever gained so much prominence in so short a time with so little effort and maintained his position so long!" Coil was not certain whether Ramsay inspired and influenced the creation of the *Hauts Grades*, with their Chivalric and Crusader themes, or whether the early *Hauts Grades* influenced Ramsay. (Ultimately, according to Coil, over 1100 High Degrees were created in 100 rites.)⁶

Our Canadian Brother Stephen Dafoe, who has written five books dealing with the Knights Templar, asserts that "although Ramsay did not tie a Masonic apron around the Templars' waist, he did connect the Freemasons with the Order of the Hospitallers, and it was for this reason, Ramsay claimed, that Masonic lodges were dedicated to Saint John. It would be the German Freemasons who add the Templar angle via the Rite of Strict Observance, which started in the late 1740s. . . . The German Masons made the claim that when the Templars had occupied the Temple of Solomon, they acquired magical powers and secret wisdom, which Jacques de Molay passed on to his successor prior to his execution."

Dafoe continues: "There was also the claim that the Templar torch was passed to Pierre d'Aumont, who had fled to Scotland, where the exiled Templars established Freemasonry. From Scotland it returned to France and thence on to Germany. In Scandinavian countries, the Masons drew their lineage through the Order of Christ in Portugal,...that de Molay's nephew had carried his ashes to Stockholm, buried them there, and later on established the Swedish Templar order. There was also the claim that the Templars had assisted Robert the Bruce in the Battle of Bannockburn, who later established the Order of Heredom on their behalf as a repayment."

Dafoe asserts “none of these accounts had a kernel of truth in them, but as the Masonic author Burton E. Bennett wrote in 1926:

These fabrications were made for the purpose of establishing an Order not only that nobles of all countries could join, but that all who joined would believe they became ennobled. Designing men took advantage of it to obtain both money and power through the ‘lost secrets,’ occultism and magic. It was an age that believed not only with personal contact with God, but also with the devil; and the supposed secrets of the Ancient Masons furnished the seed for all this tremendous growth.”

Dafoe has a new book, to be published this year, entitled *The Compasses and the Cross: A History of the Masonic Knights Templar*.⁷

According to Coil, the first documented reference to a Masonic Templar degree or ceremony is in the records of Andrew’s Royal Arch Chapter at Boston, Mass., on Aug. 28, 1769, when “Bro. William Davis...was made by receiving the four steps, that of Excellent, Super-excellent, Royal Arch, and Knight Templar.” The next oldest reference is a warrant issued by the Master of Kilwinning Lodge, Scotland, to the High Knights Templar of Ireland Lodge on Oct. 8, 1779.⁸

What if, contrary to *Born in Blood*, there is no causal connection between Masonry and the Knights Templar? What if the connection between Masonry and the Templars is only a lecture (or the notes of a lecture), to have been given one night in Paris in 1737? Even if there is no causal connection between the Templars and the Masons, the Poor Fellow Soldiers of Christ and the Temple of Solomon are still worth my attention, my respect, and my affection. I will still “claim kin” to these noble warrior monks. Those facts of history communicated by Robinson are fascinating. At the very least, I am made aware of this noble Order and its history during and after the Crusades—a history which is fascinating and inspiring in its own right, and worth my time, my study, and my profound respect. At the center of their story is the Temple. At the center of our story is our temple—that Temple we labor to erect in our hearts for the indwelling of God. Their story inspires us to, in the words of the Gospel of Matthew, “let your lights so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Matt 5:16) I suppose, as Masons, we guard the routes to the East for those weary pilgrims traveling thereto in search of light.

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1. Coil, Henry Wilson, 33°. *Coil’s Masonic Encyclopedia*. 1996, Richmond, VA: Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Co., Inc. Page 501.
 2. Coil, page 499.
 3. [“Quietism,”](#) September 11, 2008.
 4. Coil, page 499.

5. Coil, pages 501-502.
6. Coil, page 503.
7. Scottish Rite Journal. 2008.
8. Coil, page 349.