

Introduction

I had several motives in preparing these papers. The first was simply to learn more about the history and culture of various countries which have contributed so much to the growth of our human knowledge and experience. Writing helps to organize your thinking. A second was to have some talks to present as a Accredited Masonic Lecturer, which had some Masonic purpose apart from generally helping to make a daily contribution in Masonic knowledge while being adequately entertaining for a night in Lodge. This included an examination of the lives of Freemasons who made notable contributions to their country and to Freemasonry.

We in Australia live in a relatively young country which has never had a major revolution nor been invaded by a foreign power (at least for more than 200 years). But many countries, where Freemasonry flourishes, have long histories and very old cultures – Turkey, Italy and Greece – many were born in, or fundamentally changed by, revolution – USA, Russia and France – and some were occupied by foreign forces which made changes in their culture – India, Vietnam, Malaysia – or suppressed Freemasonry for a time – some Scandinavian countries. Freemasonry survives under different forms of National Government such as Communism – Cuba – or State Religions - Thailand and Morocco. Australia is multi-cultural, which means that our neighbour sometimes surprises us, but, as a corollary, we seem to struggle for a National identity and even our Freemasonry seems to constantly be seeking better directions. But each of the countries discussed in these papers knows who they are and each has a story to tell us from which we can learn more about what Freemasonry has been through and how it came to be what it is now.

While we do not have a National Grand Lodge for Australia, our transition from Masonic dependence on Britain, Scotland and Ireland to Grand Lodges in each of the States has been more or less complete and harmonious. However many countries have not achieved Masonic independence and some have schismatic tensions between Grand Lodges in their own country. In many of these countries Freemasonry will survive and grow through its attraction to its indigenous people but Australia is multi-cultural, and future growth in Freemasonry in Australia will depend to some extent on its attraction for immigrant peoples. Therefore it is important that we understand the history and culture in the countries from which they came and particularly the state and history of Freemasonry there.

In some countries Freemasonry is of an esoteric nature and not recognized by main-stream Freemasonry. Indeed there are a wide variety of Masonic allegiances and Freemasonry cannot be said to be consistent or homogeneous on a world-wide scale. I have not limited the discussion in these talks to those Grand Lodges which are considered to be “regular” and with which he have inter-visitation rights. In many instances “irregular” Grand Lodges were once “regular” and may become so again.

Editorial matters

There are several editorial problems. Proper attention is paid to those non-Masons who made significant contributions to the growth of their country, but there may be an understandable bias in emphasis towards the contribution made by known Freemasons. Several meaningful contributors will, no doubt, have been omitted through ignorance or the need for some level of brevity as the papers in this collection are meant to be available as talks.

In addition, although care is taken to stipulate Masonic attachments, where they are known, there are several reasons why some major Masonic contributors may not have been identified as such. One of these reasons, for instance, is that access to records is restricted or not available through normal sources. There were also times when it was not politically advisable for Masonic membership to be known or when privacy took precedence. Where there is some doubt but I feel confident after some degree of search, I express the doubt. Throughout the papers the names of known Masons are shown bold, but Masonic titles are often not given.

The collection has been written so that each paper could be used as a talk in Lodge intended to last about 35-40 minutes. Each paper is intended to deal with the National history and Masonic history of one country at a time although, of course, they influence each other and some papers group some countries together.

Acknowledgements

Where possible the source from which information has been obtained is provided in footnotes, with sufficient detail to find the original source, but not necessarily full detail. The source is always given for quotes. Often the source is simply stated as, for instance, „Wikipedia“ and, although it makes internal references, it is up to the reader to assess its credibility. However, as most of these papers were assembled as talks rather than for publication, many source references are missing but have been adapted from articles on the web, particularly „Wikipedia“ to which I have subscribed with grateful thanks. I also acknowledge the constant reliable help given by VWBro Neil Morse KL.

The talks are best presented with slide shows of some or all of the pictures imbedded in the text all of which have been obtained from public sources.

Conclusion

These talks are intended for your education, enjoyment and, I trust, inspiration. They often also point to issues of Masonic Principles or Governance and may contain attitudes which are my own entirely and are not necessarily representative of those in any Lodge to which I belong or the Grand Lodge to which I owe loyalty. Some papers, which were written some time ago, have not been updated to reflect today.

Some papers contain reference to issues of religion, and, as religion is not permitted to be discussed in our Lodges, they do not discuss matters of dogma or tenet but simply describe how a religious position affects the working of a Grand Lodge – such as the Grand Orient of France or the Swedish Rite.

Some papers describe the role that some famous Freemasons played in the political revolution that transformed their country, like Garibaldi or Voltaire. While their attitudes may have been partly moulded by Freemasonry, they were all patriots and fought for what they believed in. Their Lodges and Grand Lodges, in most cases, had no direct part to play in their activities. In those instances where a Grand Lodge became politically involved, the result was usually disastrous for Freemasonry.

The enduring story in these papers is the resilience of Freemasonry to overcome persecution and other crippling difficulties. The story of world Freemasonry cannot fail to inspire us.

In summary, the countries discussed in the papers in this collection so far are as follows:-

Bulgaria	Israel, Lebanon, Syria & Jordan
China, Hong Kong, Macau, Japan, Korea & Vietnam	Italy
Cuba	Philippines
Egypt	Russia
Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania	Scandinavian Countries
France	Singapore, Malaysia & Thailand
Germany	Spain and Portugal
Greece	Turkey
India	United States of America

Of course many other countries have interesting stories of Masonic experiences and, in consequence, I have every intention of continuing to study other countries.

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