

ALBERT GALLATIN MACKEY, M. D. MASONIC SCHOLAR

You show, by your presence here tonight, that you care not only about the forms and rituals of the Masonic Lodge, but also that you seek a greater understanding of the traditions and beauty of the history of this great brotherhood. We also share a great regard and admiration for those Brothers who have gone this way before, and who have by their service and dedication done so much to advance the ideals and understanding that we now claim as heirs to this wonderful legacy.

We can all name Masons, some famous and some not, who have lived so as to exemplify their belief in the teaching of the Lodge and have thus advanced its cause in the world. Other Masons have, by their study and work, explained the history, teachings, and organization of the Lodge to the world at large. It is of one of these great Masonic scholars that I want to talk to you about tonight. His name, Albert G. Mackey, we all recognize as a great researcher and writer, and many of us have his Encyclopedia of Freemasonry on our bookshelves. This publication, which is one of the most complete compilations of Masonic lore, is crammed with detailed information in two volumes. I, for one, knew little of Albert Mackey's life or background until I did some reading in preparation for this talk.

Albert G. Mackey was born in March 1807 in Charleston, South Carolina. He was the youngest son of a doctor in that city, and his family was able to give him the advantages of an excellent education and a knowledge of classical languages. At an early age, he became a schoolteacher in the Charleston area and continued to study and advance his education. He applied for, and received, admittance to the South Carolina Medical College. He graduated from there with honors in 1832. Shortly after his graduation, Albert G. Mackey married, and in due course became the father of four sons and two daughters. Mackey was a successful physician in Charleston and served heroically during a cholera epidemic which gained him great admiration in the area.

However, a great change came upon this busy and well-regarded doctor about this time. Albert Mackey was raised to the Degree of a Master Mason in 1841 and was so enthused with the Lodge that he immediately transferred from his home Lodge to another in the city that needed help. Mackey was not one who became enamored of a new thing and then grew tired of it. When additional time and effort were required, Mackey continued in this Lodge as Master until it was revived and, on its feet again. In 1843 Mackey became the Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of South Carolina, adding to that duty the office of Grand Lecturer in 1845 (in which offices he continued until 1866).

To go back to the year 1842, we find that Dr. Mackey gave up his prosperous practice of medicine and devoted his entire efforts to literary subjects. He was connected with many literary and political journals, some as editor, some as an author. He wrote on numerous subjects,

including, “Temperaments,” “The Middle Ages,” “The Poetry of the Talisman,” and “The True Condition of Women.” Was there a connection between his joining his Lodge a year earlier and his deciding to devote himself to writing and research? I cannot tell, but surely the teaching and symbolism found in the Lodge must have inspired him to think of the beauties of language and the written word.

Mackey lived in one of the most secessionist states, but he remained ever loyal to the Union. Mackey’s devotion to what he believed to be right was also shown in the fact that, at a time when Masonry was decimated by the anti-Masonic feeling that pervaded the country after the Morgan Affair, he became a member of all the Bodies in Charleston. He continued to be active in all phases of Masonry in the York Rite and served as the Grand High Priest, the Grand Illustrious Master and as Eminent Commander of South Carolina Commandery No. 1.

At an early period in his Masonic career, Dr. Mackey also took a great interest in the Scottish Rite of Masonry, whose profound philosophy he found most impressive. He was crowned a Sovereign Grand Inspector General in the Supreme Council for the Southern Jurisdiction in 1844 and was selected to serve as Secretary General. Interestingly, the Scottish Rite had been dormant at this time for a period of about fifteen years, but for the fifteen years Mackey did much to revive it. Mackey was instrumental in getting General Albert Pike to become the head of the Scottish Rite. IN 1859, he wrote to Pike, “You must and shall be at its head ... I waive, absolutely, my own claims as the oldest member now living.” Pike was unquestionably the father of modern Scottish Rite Masonry, but it is also certain that through Mackey’s insistence, Pike was elected as the Grand Commander, with Mackey the Mother of the idea. When General Pike was installed in January 1859, there began a close friendship and association that continued over twenty-two years between these two outstanding Masons of the nineteenth century.

Mackey remained in Charleston during the Civil War years. In 1865, due to his loyalty to the Union, Mackey was appointed Collector of Customs by President Andrew Johnson. However, in 1870, he gave up all political life and moved to Washington, D. C. to devote full time to writing and the duties of the Secretary General of the Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite.

Mackey’s first book on Masonry, **The Lexicon of Freemasonry**, was written in 1845. For the next thirty-six years he averaged a book every two and a half years. He published several short-lived Masonic publications and wrote innumerable articles for other publications. Mackey’s energy must have been limitless, for he did all this writing in addition to his other duties in the many Masonic offices which he held.

Mackey’s crowning achievement, and for which he is chiefly honored today, was his **Encyclopedia of Freemasonry**, published in 1873. Mackey died in 1881, but this work, through its many revisions and later editions, has remained one of the principal sources of historical Masonry. What a task it must have been to have assembled and compiled the mass of information that is contained in this opus.

But, how in keeping this overwhelming project was in Bro. Mackey’s life! As Mackey states in the preface of his **Encyclopedia**, “The more that is published by scholarly pens on its (Masonry’s) principles, the more will other scholars be attracted to its investigation ... It was the

desire to give my contribution toward the elevation of the Order, by aiding in the dissemination of some of that light and knowledge which are not of easy access, that impelled me years ago to commence the preparation of this work.”

Brethren, as members and friends of this Lodge of Research, what greater goal can we have than aiding in the dissemination of some of that light and knowledge regarding Masonry which is not of easy access? It’s a challenge, but one that I believe William O. Ware Lodge of Research has been meeting.

I am glad to be a member of this Lodge and thus to be able to gain the benefit of the knowledge and experience of those good Masons who give of their time and effort in its behalf. In this way, we carry on the tradition and dedication of such men and Brothers as Albert Gallatin Mackey, M. D., Masonic Scholar.

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William O. Ware Lodge of Research
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