

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

September 2019 Book Review

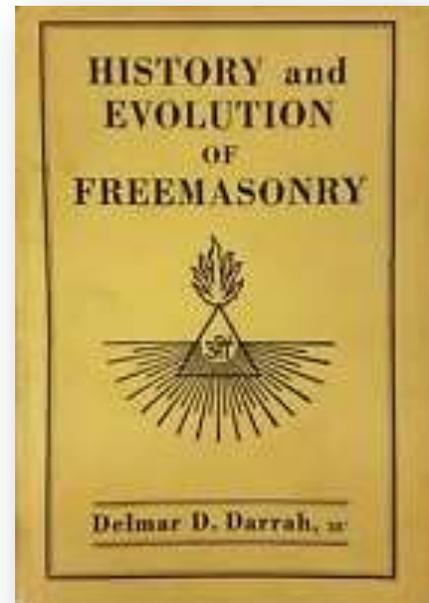
The History and Evolution of Freemasonry, Delmar D. Darrah

Delmar D. Darrah's *The History and Evolution of Freemasonry* is a gem that should be much better known than it is.

Written in 1915, *The History and Evolution of Freemasonry* traces the development of the Craft from its earliest emergence through the early years of the Twentieth Century. Although the book is now over one hundred years old, and consequently is dated, it remains an excellent account of the story of Freemasonry through the time at which it was written.

M. W. Bro. Darrah uses a fact-based approach to the history of the Fraternity seldom found among Masonic historians, particularly those of his era. Darrah wrote, "Masons have believed the things concerning the origin of the institution that they wanted to believe and have gone forth and told them as facts. When links were missing, they have been supplied by drawing upon fertile imaginations." Darrah cites the works of Robert Freke Gould and William James Hughan as his primary influences in setting about the task of recording the history of Freemasonry. He is highly critical of James Anderson and George Oliver as historians of Freemasonry, while recognizing their other contributions to the Craft. In his excellent chapter on Anderson's Constitutions, Darrah includes the "Old Charges" in their entirety.

Perhaps one of the most significant aspects of Darrah's work is his consistent theme regarding the evolution of Freemasonry over the centuries. He painstakingly points out the incongruities between common practices in the 18th Century and those present in the early years of the 20th Century. Darrah attributes such to the evolving nature of Freemasonry, taking care to assert that while specific practices (and rituals) change over the years, it is the underlying nature of the philosophy of Freemasonry that remains constant. One of the most significant examples given in the book is the evolution of the



current Third, or Master Mason, Degree. Darrah cites this occurrence as proof that our ritual has evolved from its original form and continues to evolve. Darrah asserts that when Freemasonry ceases to evolve it is “finished” and being “finished” is tantamount to a death sentence.

The History and Evolution of Freemasonry includes the account of Freemasonry in Europe and in the United States. His account of the Morgan Affair and the period of anti-Masonry that followed is the book’s weakest section. M. W. Bro. Darrah takes the account of an Ohio Mason who claimed to have known one of the men accused of kidnapping Morgan as proof that Morgan was not murdered by Masons. In this instance, Bro. Darrah strayed from his own insistence on the application of strict academic standards of research.

Other notable chapters in the book review the Roman Catholic Church’s opposition to Freemasonry (the tone of this chapter is less than conciliatory), the proliferation of Landmarks (Bro. Darrah finds them confusing and the invention of Albert Mackey) and the symbolism of the Order.

His chapter on Prince Hall Masonry reflects the tenor of the time in which it was written. Darrah states that the separation of Prince Hall Masonry from mainstream Grand Lodge Masonry will continue to exist “as long as human prejudice separates the white man and the black man.”

An especially interesting chapter is entitled “Masonic Economics.” In this chapter, he writes, “The sum total of human happiness is expressed in the wages of a Fellowcraft – plenty, health and peace. If a man has plenty – which means bread and water – health and peace, he has drawn the wages of life according to the standards of Masonry.” Darrah goes on in this chapter to discuss the wisdom of knowing when one has “enough.”

M. W. Bro. Darrah also includes a brief history of the York Rite and Scottish Rite Degrees. In his discussion of the York Rite, he addresses the notion that Freemasonry has its roots among the Knight Templars but dismisses such a theory as being wholly without foundation.

M. W. Bro. Darrah’s *The History and Evolution of Freemasonry* is extremely accessible and is appropriate for Masons of all Degrees. It is enlightening to the new Mason as well as the more seasoned Brother.

The History and Evolution of Freemasonry is available through amazon.com or from other booksellers.

Most Worshipful Bro. Darrah was a professor of elocution and a basketball coach (both men's and women's teams) at Illinois Wesleyan University. He served as Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Illinois in 1912-1913.

**Reviewed by Dan M. Kemble, Master
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