

# Old Wine in New Bottles: The Masonic Writings of Frederick Dalcho in Context <sup>1</sup>

Paul C. Graham, PM  
Cayce, South Carolina  
Fort Jackson Lodge No. 374  
Columbia, South Carolina

*And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles will perish.*

*But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved...*

- Luke 5: 37-37, KJV -

## Introduction

In his *History of Freemasonry in South Carolina*, Albert Mackey memorializes the passing of Frederick Dalcho with disturbing, almost offensive, duplicity. On the one hand, Mackey praises Dalcho for his years of dedication to Freemasonry, and on the other hand denigrates and dismisses—in the most unseemly manner considering the *context* of his criticism—the writings of a deceased brother. In part, Mackey’s memoir reads as follows:

As a Mason, in which character we are more particularly in this place to view him, he was entitled to much praise for the progress he had made in the study of the institution at a time when little was known of its true scientific and philosophical



<sup>1</sup> Presented 21 August 2003, Columbia Council No.

bearings. Although, at his day, the writings of Dalcho would not be considered as *sufficiently erudite* to place him in an *elevated* position among Masonic authors, he was undoubtedly ahead of the masses among whom he lived. With the *real* antiquities of Masonry he appears to have been but little acquainted; of its symbology, he was *almost wholly ignorant*; and the *true meaning* of its legendary history, he must, if we are to judge from his writings, have had a *very inadequate conception*...

To the Masons of South Carolina, Dr. Dalcho was undoubtedly a benefactor, and his brethren of that State, however they may choose to estimate his services as a Masonic writer, are bound to respect his memory for the fidelity with which he discharged the various important trusts that were confided to him.<sup>2</sup>

Upon first reading Mackey's memorial, one might shake one's head in disbelief. Dalcho, after all, was one of the original founders of the Ancient & Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry in this country, one of the architects responsible for the creation of our current Grand Lodge (A.F.M.) from the two competing Grand Lodges in South Carolina in 1817, long-time Grand Chaplain of the Grand Lodge (1817-1823), author of the State's first edition of the *Ahiman Rezon, et cetera*. One has to ask, "What is going on here?" One is tempted, at first glance, to dismiss it as mere egotism. This is especially true if we consider Mackey's statements concerning *his* edition of the *Ahiman Rezon* and Dalcho's edition of the *Ahiman Rezon*, which may be found both in the work previously cited and the most current edition of the *Ahiman Rezon* used in this Grand Jurisdiction.<sup>3</sup> There is much more, however, to this story...

---

<sup>2</sup> Mackey, Albert G. *The History of Freemasonry in South Carolina, From Its Origin in the Year 1736 to the Present Time*. Columbia, SC: South Carolina Steam Power Press, 1861. Reprinted for the Grand Lodge A.F.M. of S.C., 1998. pp. 268-269, italics mine.

<sup>3</sup> See *Ibid*, p. 268 and *The Ahiman Rezon or Book of Constitutions of the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free Masons of South Carolina*. 37<sup>th</sup> Edition. Columbia, SC: The Grand Lodge A.F.M. of S.C., 1999. pp. 7-10. For further information of the history of the *Ahiman Rezon* in South Carolina, see Barry A. Rickman's "Evolution of the *Ahiman Rezon*." *Transactions of the South Carolina Masonic Research Society*, Vol. 5. Columbia, SC: SCMRS, 1992. pp. 107-117.

In addition to Mackey's criticism—criticism from within the Craft, if you will—we find that Dalcho was among the favorite *whipping-boys* of the Anti-Masonic movement that swept through our country in the late 1820s after the abduction and alleged murder of Captain William Morgan of Batavia, New York, in 1826. This movement exercised considerable influence over the public perception of the Craft well into the 1840s and gave rise to our country's first third party political faction, the so-called Anti-Masonic Party. Henry Dana Ward, in particular, dedicated no less than four editions of his influential magazine, *The Anti-Masonic Review*, to Dalcho's writings during the first year of its publication.<sup>4</sup> Mr. Ward was a renouncing Mason and one of the original participants in the formation of the Anti-Masonic movement. While we have no direct evidence of his presence at the infamous signing of the *Declaration of Independence from the Masonic Institution* held in Le Roy, New York, July 4, 1828, we do know that Mr. Ward was a delegate to the Anti-Masonic Convention held in Albany, New York, on the following February in 1829.<sup>5</sup> In his magazine, Mr. Ward used both Dalcho's *Ahiman Rezon* and his *Masonic Orations* to fuel the fires of prejudice and hate in the early days of this movement. Dalcho's name and works appear throughout the dialogue and debates of this period. We find Dalcho, for example, singled out in the *Proceedings of the Anti-Masonic State Convention* held in Montpelier, Vermont, in 1830.<sup>6</sup> What did Dalcho write to merit this kind of criticism both from within and without?

This paper will explore the Masonic thought of Frederick Dalcho—particularly his understanding of the origin and history of the Craft—as presented through his writings, and will attempt to

---

<sup>4</sup> *The Anti-Masonic Review and Magazine: Published in the City of New York, Intended to Take Note of the Origin and History, of the Pretensions and Character, and of the Standard Works and Productions of Free Masonry* by Henry Dana Ward, A.M., A Renouncing Mason. New York: Vaserpool & Cole, Printers, 1828-1830.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard, Elder David. *Light on Masonry: A Collection of All the Most Important Documents on the Subject of Speculative Free Masonry*. Utica, NY: William Williams, Printer, 1829. (Reprinted by Kessinger Publishing Company, Montana, U.S.A., n.d.), Appendix No. II, p. 29.

<sup>6</sup> *Proceedings of the Anti-masonic State Convention. Holden at Montpelier, June 23, 24, & 25, 1830. With Reports, Addresses, &c.* Middlebury: Published by Order of the Convention by O. & J. Miner, Printers, 1830. In *New Mormon Studies CD-ROM*. Smith Research Associates, 1998.

demonstrate how they may be viewed and appreciated in their historical context. This paper is not concerned with the man or his life. There have been many writers who have treated his biography and have catalogued his contribution to the Craft, but there is little or nothing written concerning his contributions to the canon of Masonic literature. There is good reason for this. While his name and reputation is universally known throughout the Masonic world, his writings on Freemasonry are obscure, and his views of the origin, nature, and purpose of the fraternity are virtually unknown. Only a scant few have access to his works and those who do have had to go to great lengths—both in terms of time and cost—to gain access to them.

### **Brief Overview of Dr. Dalcho's Writings**

For the purposes of this paper, we will confine ourselves to two of Dr. Dalcho's works, *viz.*, *An Ahiman Rezon*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition (1807) and *Dr. Dalcho's Orations*, reprinted by the Prince Masons of Ireland in 1808.<sup>7</sup> We will further limit our treatment of Dalcho's work by focusing on his understanding of the origin, history, and purpose of the Craft. This will give a basic overview of how he viewed the fraternity with which to work.

According to Dalcho, "The origin of Masonry may be dated from the creation of the world." Furthermore, "The symmetry and harmony displayed by the divine Architect in the formation of the planetary system gave rise to many of our mysteries."<sup>8</sup> *Symmetry* and *harmony* are the key concepts in grasping Dalcho's understanding of the origins of the Craft. Dalcho elaborates this understanding in the following passage:

---

<sup>7</sup> I have been unable to locate a copy of the original printings of these addresses from which to work. Evidence seems to indicate that the *Orations*, which appear in the Irish edition, were published separately in Charleston between the years 1801 and 1803 at the request of the Sublime Grand Lodge of South Carolina, before whom these *Orations* were given.

<sup>8</sup> Dalcho. *Orations. Oration I*, p. 8-9. See also, Dalcho. . *Ahiman Rezon*. p. 61.

Ever since symmetry began, and harmony displayed her charms, our Order has had a being. During many ages, and in many countries, it has flourished. In the dark periods of antiquity, when literature was in a low state, and the rude manners of our forefathers withheld from them that knowledge we so amply share, Free-Masonry diffused its influence. This science unveiled, arts arose, civilizations took place, and the progress of science and philosophy gradually dispelled the gloom of ignorance and barbarism.<sup>9</sup>

Freemasonry, itself, embraces and comprehends within its circle “every branch of useful knowledge and learning.” Thus understood, the arts, sciences, and other “useful arts” are a part of the more exhaustive and comprehensive category of Freemasonry. According to Masonic tradition, “Geometry” and “Masonry” were once synonymous terms.<sup>10</sup> It is by the art of geometry that we come to understand the symmetry and harmony of nature, and by extension, we come to know the Grand Architect who designed it. If we equate these terms, the origins of Freemasonry, as expressed in the writings of Dalcho, become clearer. In a passage that should be familiar to us all, Dalcho writes:

By Geometry, then, we may curiously trace nature, through her various windings to her more concealed recesses... A survey of nature, and the observation of her beautiful proportions, first determined man to imitate the Divine plan, and study symmetry and order. This gave rise to societies, and birth to every useful art...<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Dalcho. *Ahiman Rezon*. pp. 2-3.

<sup>10</sup> Webb. Thomas Smith. *The Freemason's Monitor or Illustrations of Masonry in Two Parts*. Facsimile reprint of the 1<sup>st</sup> edition, published at Albany, NY by Spencer and Webb, 1797. Bloomington, IN: The Masonic Book Club, 1996. p. 62. Webb's influence abundant throughout Dalcho's edition of the *Ahiman Rezon*. That the words “Masonry” and “Geometry” are still said to be synonymous is still found in the Fellow Craft Lecture communicated in South Carolina.

<sup>11</sup> Dalcho. *Ahiman Rezon*. pp. 77-78. This passage was not written by Dalcho, but is attributed to an address given by Brother Charles Leslie in 1741 before Vernon Kilwinning Lodge in the city of Edinburgh. See footnote, *Ahiman Rezon*, 33<sup>rd</sup> edition (1999), p. 129.

While this passage is not attributed to Dalcho's authorship, it does appear in his edition of the *Ahiman Rezon* and echoes the sentiments elaborated on above. By imitating the symmetry and order of the Nature, we become Masons in the most *universal* sense of the word. We become *promoters* of society and *patrons* of every useful art. In this view, Freemasonry is *not* presented as a formal institution but, rather, as a primal urge to or desire to understand and imitate the Divine.

While Dalcho traces the origins of Masonry to the creation of the world, he rejects the idea that the patriarchs and prophets of the Bible were Freemasons. Dalcho says,

That our adorable Creator was the Grand Architect of heaven and earth, none but madmen can doubt; but that our primordial parent was a Freemason because he sewed two or three fig leaves together is too insignificant a supposition to require a serious refutation. No, my respectable Brethren, we degrade ourselves and our illustrious society by advocating such untenable doctrines, and those voluminous plodders of Masonic history, who make Masons of every man of note, from Adam to Nimrod, and from Nimrod to Solomon, down to the present day, certainly deserve much credit for their industry, but none for their talents. Indeed we have incontestable proofs that many of the number they enumerate were perfectly ignorant of the mystic institution...<sup>12</sup>

What these incontestable proofs are, we do not know. Nevertheless, we are now faced with a belief that, at first glance, seems contradictory. We have the origin of Freemasonry dated to the creation, and we have a myriad of characters, including King Solomon himself, who were “perfectly ignorant of the mystic institution.” This notion represents a radical break with earlier Masonic writers, particularly Dr. James Anderson, the author of the first *Book of Constitutions* published in 1723.

---

<sup>12</sup> Dalcho. *Oration II*, p. 10.

If *these* men know nothing of the Craft, who did? To the modern reader, as well as to earlier students of Freemasonry, one might venture to say it was the medieval architects and operative stone masons who first formalized the institution of Freemasonry. After all, our fraternity, as we know it, is the speculative branch of Masonry which grew out of the operative branch of the same. This would naturally exclude Adam, Nimrod, Solomon, and others who had, at this point, all gone the way of the world. Right? Wrong. According to Dalcho,

It has been generally reported, and as generally believed, that our society was instituted, for architectural purposes, by handicraftsmen. What gave rise to this idea, I am at a loss to determine, as the *blue* degrees have *no written records* to explain the difficulty, and tradition is too lame to give satisfaction to a scientific mind.<sup>13</sup>

Dalcho even goes so far as to say that the word “Mason” is unconnected with the trade of the same name. “The word *Mason*,” says Dalcho, “is derived from the greek [sic], and, literally means a member of a religious order, or one who is professedly devoted to the worship of the Deity.” If it was not the craft guilds or “Masons” that instituted Masonry, then *who* instituted the order and *for what purpose*? Dalcho's etymology of the word “Mason” gives us our first clue. In the following passage, he further elaborates on his position:

I am of the opinion that the ancient society of *Free and Accepted Masons* was never a body of architects; that is, they were not originally embodied for the purposes of building; but were associated for moral and religious purposes... Our manner of teaching the principles of our mystic profession, is **derived** from the *Druids*, who worshiped one supreme God, immense and infinite; our maxims of morality from *Pythagoras*; who taught the duties we owe to God as our creator, and man as our fellow creature; many of our emblems are originally from Egypt; the science of *Abrax*, and the characters of those

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

emanations of the Deity, which we have adopted are derived from *Basilides*.<sup>14</sup>

Does Dalcho mean that the craft is literally descended from these diverse teachers, traditions, and orders? On first reading, one would be tempted to say yes, however; he uses the word “derived.” This word would seem to indicate that someone, at sometime, decided to employ, use, or emulate some of the teaching and techniques of the most celebrated thinkers, teachers, and traditions of the ages. In another place, however, Dalcho is more explicit with regards to the role the Druids played in the formation of institutional Freemasonry. In an echo of a passage cited above, he says that

...The Masonick [sic] ceremonies and mysteries are derived from institutions of the most remote ages; and it is probable, the most perfect remains of the Druidical rites are to be found in some of the ceremonies of Free-Masons. When the Druid committed anything to writing, they used the Greek alphabet. From a variety of circumstances which cannot be published, it is inferred, that the name of *Free-Mason* was strongly expressive of the nature of the society, which was originally established for religious purposes, and having no relation to architects...<sup>15</sup>

This passage makes him liable to the charge that he believed that the institutional and ritualistic structure of Freemasonry has its origins, at least in part, with the Druids. I believe that Dalcho believed this to be the case. We must now ask how is it that the craft has its origins at the creation of the world *and* was derived from the religious order known as the Druids. Before we answer this question, we need to return to Dalcho's original notion of the *basis* of the institution and its *reason* for being, namely, to study symmetry and order *and* to seek to understand and imitate the “Divine Plan.”

---

<sup>14</sup> Dalcho. *Orations. Oration I*, p. 11. Bold mine.

<sup>15</sup> Dalcho. *Ahiman Rezon*. p. 140.

The purpose for instituting a formal order, in Dalcho's view, was to concentrate the wisdom of the times, and to secure and perpetuate it to future ages.<sup>16</sup>

To secure their labors from interruption and themselves from calumny and reproach, the primitive philosophers associated together for the cultivation of the arts and sciences. Enveloped with the veil of mystery, and secure from vulgar eyes, they were occupied with reasoning on the wonderful operations of nature, and the divine attributes of nature's God. Experiments were instituted to establish *data*, and as operations and effects were multiplied, causes were developed, and the sciences and fine arts were established on unperishable [sic] principles. Emerging "from the ignorance and blindness in which they had been overwhelmed, they traced the divinity through the walks of his power, and his mighty deeds. *Contemplation*, at first went forth admiring, but yet without comprehension from whence all things had their existence: Contemplation returned, glowing with conviction, that one, great, *original*, of infinite power, of infinite intelligence, and of benevolence without bounds, was the master of all. They beheld him in his works, they read his majesty in the heavens, and discovered his miracles in the deep: every plant that painted the face of nature, and everything having the breath of life, described his presence and his power."<sup>17</sup>

Certainly the drive to understand nature, her mysteries, and her Creator pre-date the Druids. Certainly the "primitive philosophers" were not Druids. So, why the Druids?

Dalcho was not the first Masonic writer to single out the Druids as a possible source of Masonry's institutional and ritualistic structure. Other writers, including the famed Masonic author William Preston, offer the Druids as a possible source for the Masonic Order. According to Preston:

---

<sup>16</sup> See *Ibid*, *Oration II*, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8.

The Druids are said to have retained many usages among them similar to those of masons; but of what they chiefly consisted, we cannot, at this distance of time, with certainty discover. These philosophers held their assemblies in woods and groves, and observed the most impenetrable secrecy in explaining their principles and opinions, which being known only to themselves, must have perished with them... It is suggested that the Druids derived their system of government from Pythagoras. Study and speculation were the favourite [sic] pursuits of these philosophers. In their private retreats they entered into a disquisition of the origin, laws, and properties of matter, the form and magnitude of the universe, and even the most sublime and hidden secrets of nature. On these subjects they formed a variety of hypotheses, which they delivered to their disciples in verse, that they might more easily retain them in memory, being bound by oath not to write them.

In this manner the Druids communicated their particular tenets, and under the veil of mystery concealed every branch of useful knowledge. This secured to their order universal admiration and respect, while their religious instructions were every where received with reverence and submission. To them was committed the education of youth, and from their seminaries issued many valuable productions. They determined all causes, ecclesiastical and civil; they taught philosophy, astrology, politics, rites, and ceremonies; and in songs recommended the heroic deeds of great men to the imitation of posterity...<sup>18</sup>

Other non-Masonic writers, like Thomas Paine, attributed the origins of the Craft to the Druids, though his declarations seem to be more emphatic than either Dalcho or Preston:

---

<sup>18</sup> Preston, William. *Illustrations of Masonry*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. LONDON: Printed for J. Wilkie, 1775. pp. 186-188. *Preston's Illustrations of Masonry* (CD-ROM). Ed. Edited by Andrew Prescott, The Centre for Research into Freemasonry at The University of Sheffield. Sheffield: Academy Electronic Publications Ltd., 2001.

To come then at once to the point, Masonry... is derived and is the remains of the religion of the ancient Druids; who, like the magi of Persia and the priests of Heliopolis in Egypt, were priests of the sun. They paid worship to this great luminary, as the great visible agent of a great invisible first cause, whom they styled "Time without limits."

The Christian religion and Masonry have one and the same common origin: both are derived from the worship of the sun. The difference between their origin is, that the Christian religion is a parody on the worship of the sun, in which they put a man whom they call Christ, in the place of the sun, and pay him the same adoration which was originally paid to the sun...

In Masonry many of the ceremonies of the Druids are preserved in their original state, at least without any parody. With them the sun is still the sun; and his image in the form of the sun is the great emblematical ornament of Masonic lodges and Masonic dresses. It is the central figure on their aprons, and they wear it also pendant on the breast of their lodges, and in their processions. It has the figure of a man, as at the head of the sun, as Christ is always represented.<sup>19</sup>

In matters theological, Paine and Dalcho could not have been more different. Nevertheless, they both saw something in the structure of the Druids akin to Freemasonry and they made the connection.

This alleged *connection* between the ancient mystery religions and Freemasonry drew many men into the fraternity during the early to mid-1700s in England, among them, William Stukeley (1687-1765). Stukeley was a medical doctor, Anglican Priest, field archeologist, English antiquarian, and Fellow of the Royal Society. He was made a Mason at the Salutation Tavern in London in 1721.<sup>20</sup> Stukeley states in his autobiography of 1753 that his "curiosity led him to be initiated into the mysteries of Masonry, suspecting it to be the remains of the ancients."<sup>21</sup> Stukeley was responsible, according to some, for the "romantic image of Druidism that persisted for more than a century

---

<sup>19</sup> Paine, Thomas. *Origin of Freemasonry*. LIFE AND WRITINGS OF THOMAS PAINE, Ed. Daniel Edwin Wheeler. New York: Vincent Parke & Co., 1908.

<sup>20</sup> *Freemasonry: A Celebration of the Craft*. Eds. John Hamill and Robert Gilbert. North Dighton, MA: J.G. Press, Inc., 1993. p. 243

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in David Cameron. "The Mysteries of the Ancients." *The Philalethes*. April 1990.

after his death."<sup>22</sup> This was accomplished, in part, through his influential work *Stonehenge, a temple restor'd to the British Druids* (1740). Stukeley's fascination with the Druids, however, was not merely literary. Stukeley was reported to have been the second "Chosen Chief" of *The Mother Grove or Grand Lodge of the Most Ancient Order of Druids* inaugurated in the year 1717 on Primrose Hill, London, at the Autumnal Equinox of the sun.<sup>23</sup> The first inaugural assembly of this order was held at the Apple Tree Tavern, Charles St., Covent Garden, London.<sup>24</sup> You may recognize the date, 1717, as the year that the Grand Lodge of England—the premier Grand Lodge for Masons all over the world—was organized. You may also recognize the location of the first inaugural assembly of this Druidical Order, the Apple Tree Tavern. It was the same tavern that housed one of the four original lodges that comprised the first Grand Lodge. This singular circumstance, this incredible historic curiosity, is mentioned only to show that Dalcho's view of Freemasonry and the Druids was not at all novel during the early days of public Masonry. In fact, it was part of its allure and, quite possibly, its early success. Dalcho thought with regards to the Druidical connection was right in line with many of the intellectual elite surrounding the modern incarnation of Freemasonry.

### **Analysis**

Dalcho's understanding of Freemasonry is best understood in terms of substance and form—"substance" being understood as the material, tendency, or potential out of which the "form" of something is built. Form is the particular "shape" that this substance takes. It is much like wine in a bottle. Wine itself has no form. It merely conforms to the container into which it is poured. Although separate, they are mutually dependent on one another. We would have no need of a wine bottle without wine. Wine is the *reason* the bottle was created. It holds the wine. We could not enjoy or savor the wine if it was not contained—without form it would spill on the floor. To use this

---

<sup>22</sup> *Freemasonry: A Celebration of the Craft*. P. 243.

<sup>23</sup> The British Circle of the Universal Bond. "The Ancient Druid Order." 1976. <http://www.carboneria.it/druidorder.htm> (August 20, 2003)

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

analogy, Dalcho, when he speaks of Freemasonry, sometimes speaks of the *wine* of Freemasonry, and other times the *wine bottle* of Freemasonry, *i.e.*, sometimes it is *substance* and sometimes it is *form*.

When Dalcho says that “The origin of Masonry may be dated from the creation of the world,” he is not referring to the Masonic Fraternity. The symmetry, harmony, and order displayed by the Divine Artist and man’s attempt to understand it is the Masonry to which he refers in this statement. It is the substance, wine, essence, or spirit of Masonry. It is the “stuff” that caused man to look beyond his day to day brute existence and contemplate the Divine by engaging and observing His creation. It is the “stuff” that gave rise to societies and the birth to every useful art. In this light, Freemasonry is truly ancient for whenever there was a man who sought to understand the universe, and by extension the Creator of the same, that man was a Mason whether he was a member of a fraternal order or not. This view of man is noble and is as useful today as it was during Dalcho’s time. It would be hard to disagree with him on this notion of Freemasonry. It exists as an institution, not because the rituals and symbols were set forth—by whom we know not—but because man, by his very nature, seeks understanding and light. This human phenomenon is the substance of the Craft. Truly, a man is first made a Mason in his heart.

After being made a Mason in his heart, what next? Naturally he would seek out others who share his desire to study, emulate, and understand the mysteries of nature and of nature’s God. When men of like minds gather, institutions are founded. These institutions begin to take on unique characteristics as it begins to understand itself. It begins to form itself, like a bottle, to contain the light and truth that has been gathered through time and experience. For Dalcho and others, the Druids and other religious and philosophical orders provided that form. They provided the rituals, signs, symbols and other outward formalities that were expressive of the desire that brought the group together in the first place. Did modern Freemasonry really come from the Druids? One seriously doubts it. But does it make sense that one living prior to the age of information

might view it that way? Sure. Is there something there that is worthy of our consideration? Yes.

The working tools employed by the modern, institutionalized craft are only symbols of the tools used by mankind in every age to improve itself and to discover the mysteries of truth. Even the fraternity itself is a symbol of something larger and more important. If Freemasonry did not exist, we would have to invent it. Lucky for us, someone already has. Perhaps it is not at all important whether or not we ever find the historical origins of our fraternity. Perhaps it is the journey and not the destination. The interchange between history and mythology is one of the most exciting parts of Freemasonry.

### **Dalcho's Critics in Context**

We began this paper by pointing out the criticisms laid out against Dalcho's writings by Mackey and others. Now let us return briefly and put these critics in context. History itself is not an exact science, but is more akin to a specialized art where the historian has to creatively engage and interpret the "facts." It seldom, if ever, is reproducible, for even a single event can be viewed from multiple angles that may or may not resemble one another. History is, by its very nature, interpretative. It is, by necessity, selective. History, if it is to be honest, must continuously alter its views as new information and techniques become available. It is never free from its own historical constraints. In short, history is never objective, but is always history perceived—history is an activity, but never a destination.

Why did the Craft distance itself from Dalcho and his work at this time? What happened between the height of Dalcho's eminence in the Masonic world and that of Mackey's? Evidence suggests that the writings of Dalcho are representative of the first of two distinct periods of the Craft in the nineteenth century. The gulf

of time that divided these men was filled with much conflict and controversy.

It would not be a stretch to place the year 1826 as the year that was the beginning of the end of the Masonic world familiar to Dalcho. That year an earthquake erupted in New England that sent shock waves throughout the country. This was the year of the abduction and alleged murder of Captain William Morgan by members of the Masonic Fraternity. Much has already been written about this event, and the particulars of the story are not important to the treatment of our topic. Let it suffice to say that this event triggered a national frenzy that called into question the very survival of the Craft. What began as a small, localized group of outraged citizens quickly grew to a national movement whose mission was to destroy the craft and wipe it altogether from the American landscape. During the decade and a half following the abduction of William Morgan, the Craft lost more than half its members.<sup>25</sup>

Most of what has been written on the Antimasonic movement focuses solely on its effect in the North. It would be natural to opine that South Carolinians viewed this as a Northern problem. During its earliest stages, this may have been true, but the long arm of prejudice, hate, and suspicion eventually reached the Palmetto State. While it is true that political Anti-Masonry never took root in South Carolina,<sup>26</sup> the influence of the broader movement certainly had its effects. It was especially influential in religious circles where Masons were viewed as unchristian at best, satanic at worst. Most active in the Anti-Masonic movement were the Baptists and the Presbyterians. Very few Episcopalians, Unitarians, or Universalists got involved.<sup>27</sup> Most of the evidence linking the effect of the

---

<sup>25</sup> Bullock, Steven C. *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730-1840*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996. p. 277.

<sup>26</sup> Of the 24 states in the Union in the Presidential election of 1830, SC cast its 11 electoral votes for State's Rights Governor John B. Floyd of Virginia. This is the only state he carried. See William Preston Vaughn's *The Antimasonic Party in the United States, 1826-1843*. University of Kentucky Press, 1983. p. 68.

<sup>27</sup> Vaughn, William Preston. *The Antimasonic Party in the United States, 1826-1843*. University of Kentucky Press, 1983. p. 22ff.

Antimasonic Movement in South Carolina is circumstantial. Here are a few items of interest:

- In 1827, the Grand Lodge of South Carolina was unable to elect a Grand Chaplain. This position remained vacant until 1840.
- In the Minutes of the 1829 Grand Lodge Communication, it was reported that 24 of the 43 lodges on the Grand Lodge registry had not been heard from for three to five years, six had surrendered their warrants, and only eleven had made returns and paid dues.
- In an address given before the Grand Lodge at the same communication, given after the annual St. John's Day Procession, The Reverend Joseph Brown "endeavored to show that Freemasonry had accomplished its mission, and that its continuance was no longer necessary or expedient." Not surprisingly, the Reverend made many brothers angry and did not receive the Traditional vote of thanks.<sup>28</sup>
- In 1832 the Grand Lodge dispensed with its traditional St. John's Day Procession. There would not be another until 1841.<sup>29</sup>

In the middle of these tumultuous years, Dr. Dalcho, gave up the ghost. He laid down the working tools of life on November 24, 1836. Masonry in South Carolina would continue to struggle until the early to mid 1840s. As things were beginning to turn around, Albert Mackey became Grand Secretary. This occurred in 1843.

Although conjecture, it is quite possible that Mackey's rejection of Dalcho's work was related to the years of struggle experienced by South Carolina Masons. It is more than probable that Mackey's new position of power made him all the more determined to build the fraternity on a more sturdy foundation. In order to accomplish this task, he would have to remove some of the pre-Morgan ideas concerning the origin and purpose of the craft. This newer, stronger

---

<sup>28</sup> Mackey. *History of Freemasonry in South Carolina*. p. 242.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 249.

incarnation of the craft would not put the old wine of Dalcho's Masonry into the new bottles of the post-Antimasonic Freemasonry of South Carolina. This may help to explained why Dalcho writings are so scarce and so little known and why Mackey was so scathing in his critique of Dalcho's writings. This may also help explain why Mackey felt it necessary to delete many items from Dalcho's two previous editions of the *Ahiman Rezon* and eliminate Dalcho's editions from the numbering sequences of subsequent editions of the *Ahiman Rezon* used in South Carolina.<sup>30</sup> Mackey's edition was now the first edition. Dalcho was an easy target for the enemies of Freemasonry. His admiration of the ancient "pagan" mysteries of the Druids made him credulous to the profane. Unless one is prepared to paint Mackey with the brush of a villain, one may be inclined, as I am, to believe that it was Mackey's love for the craft, as opposed to his animosity toward Dalcho that made him believe that it was necessary to pour out the wine of the past and put *new wine*—a new understanding of the origins of the craft—into the new bottles of a stronger and more mature fraternity.

Mackey's approach to understanding the origin and purpose of the craft would be less speculative, more pragmatic, and based on documentary evidence that could be methodically analyzed. This was not necessarily a bad thing. It was, however, the end of an era. The craft had become refined by trial and made stronger by adversity.

### **Post Script**

There are many vintages of Masonic wine that we may enjoy and appreciate. While we should not put old wine into new bottles, we should preserve with care the precious vintages so carefully crafted by our forbears. There is old, well-aged wine in our mythological history found in the books and writings of our ancient brethren. There is wine that is of recent make, which has been

---

<sup>30</sup> Barry A. Rickman's "Evolution of the Ahiman Rezon." Transactions of the South Carolina Masonic Research Society, Vol. 5. Columbia, SC: SCMRS, 1992. p. 114.

crafted with care by our mentors, coaches, brothers, and friends in the craft. Perhaps not vintage, but good wine—sometimes surprisingly good! While there is no shortage of wine, there is more wine to make, more wine to drink, and more wine to enjoy. With each new attempt, we improve our product. Time and experience bring us closer to that ideal bottle of wine. It is for us, the stewards of the vineyard of Freemasonry, to choose the best fruit and craft the best wine. It's up to us, the caretakers of the craft, to choose the finest Masonic bottles to hold the finest Masonic wine. Let us keep the old wine in old bottles. Let us put the new wine in new bottles. Let us remember that each vintage is a direct product of the peculiarities of its vineyard, the techniques of its time, and the skill of its craftsman. Sampling the wine from these various bottles of Masonic wine refines the palate and awakens in us a greater understanding of our noble heritage.