



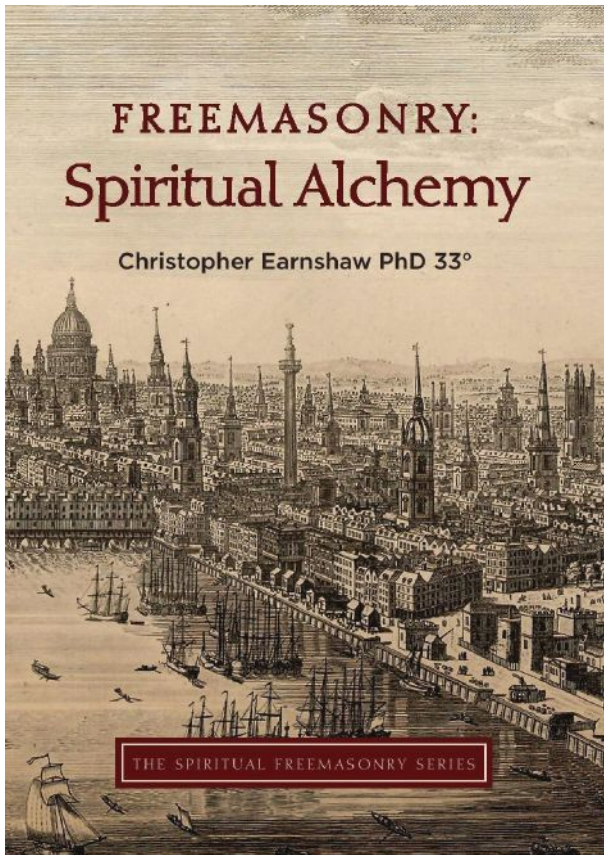
## BOOK REVIEWS

FROM THE

# ESOTERIC TO THE EXOTERIC

Earnshaw, Christopher, Ph.D. 33°, *Freemasonry: Spiritual Alchemy*, (Amazon, 2019; 234 pp. \$22.00)

Brethren progress through stages of the Masonic experience. Subjects that may at first seem obsolete, irrelevant, arcane, useless, and even silly may gradually, at times suddenly, open up to them, enrich them, and enable them to absorb their particular Light in Masonry more profoundly.



Alchemy comes to mind: what has the Craft to do with fruitless efforts to turn base metal into gold? With contemplation, the question answers itself.

Brother Earnshaw provides a road map to the intellectual processes that led to the formation of Grand Lodge Freemasonry in early eighteenth-century London. In his words:

This path we will now follow to understand the intellectual catalysts that brought about modern Freemasonry. The definitive movement that first started in Paris, arriving like a bolt out of the blue, was Rosicrucianism. The intellectual path to Freemasonry starts, in chronological order, with the teachings of the medical alchemist, Paracelsus, from around 1500, leading to Rosicrucianism, The Invisible College, Gresham College, The Royal Society and finally ending with a meeting at the Apple Tree Tavern in 1716.

In *The Emerald Tablet*, Hermes Trismegistus described the mythical third tablet of stone containing the Ten Commandments and given to Moses. As Sir Isaac Newton, Pre-eminent Member of the Royal Society, translated *The Emerald Tablet*: “It is true without lying, certain and most true. That which is Below is like that which is Above and that which is Above is like that which is Below to do the miracles of the Only Thing.” Hence the Hermetic slogan, “As above, so below.”

Earnshaw’s detailed explanation of the “Brethren of the Rosie Cross ... [who] have the Mason Word and second sight” may lead the reader to wonder why the Scottish Rite Eighteenth Degree got left out of the original Blue Lodge degrees.

Earnshaw guides the reader through the intellectual maelstrom of the 16th and 17th centuries with detailed doses of the religious, political, and ultimately scientific

developments of that era. Nevertheless, Newton's contemporary, Dr. John Woodard, complained, "this age has little regard to learning."

The Royal Society itself, founded shortly after the Restoration of King Charles II to the English throne in 1660, steered "philosophy" away from unfounded speculation, towards a new way of learning, with emphasis on empiricism and the reliability of human observation.

The bulk of Earnshaw's work wedges an extraordinary amount of detail into a relatively small space relating the stunning transition of rational thought from the imaginative, the speculative, and reliance on Biblical exegesis towards experimentation and tediously gathered data.

Alchemy, with all its secrets, superstition, and arcane symbolism, contributed to the birth of "natural philosophy," the original term for what came to be called "science." Through persistent development of formulas, mixtures, and recipes in search of gold, alchemists developed a proto- or pre-science based on experimentation that led to practical discoveries, such as the use of saltpeter to ignite gunpowder, as well as gravity, prisms, and calculus.

Alchemy's challenge to Biblical truth led to its condemnation as heresy. Despite this, many of the leading alchemists belonged to monastic orders and used alchemical techniques such as fermentation, fixation, and coagulation to create herbal medicines and tonics. Alchemy led to advances in the study of optics and the behavior of light itself. Earnshaw explains:

The reason that scholars such as Newton, Boyle, Hooke, Spinoza, Hobbes, Huygens, and Berkeley all found optics fascinating was that optics could be expressed in mathematical terms. Not only mathematics but more especially geometry, thus Dante called optics the "handmaiden" of geometry. Geometry was the language of the universe, and by understanding this language scholars could understand the works of God. Studying optics using geometry connected people to astrology, astronomy, cosmology and the mind of God.

This contrasted with the medieval theological view of light as the fundamental reality of everything, based on God's command in Genesis 1:3, "Fiat lux," let there be light.

Ironically, Newton himself practiced alchemy in secret. That exposed him to excessive quantities of mercury, which may have contributed to a nervous breakdown and his eventual death.

Earnshaw's excellent history of the Renaissance transitioning to the Enlightenment sets the stage for the title of his book. That history attempts to tell the reader what was on the minds of the founders of Freemasonry as they developed the Blue Lodge degree rituals through the 1720s. By examining the subjects studied by educated gentlemen during that era, he attempts to extract the philosophy, ideas, beliefs, and principles incorporated into Masonic ritual as the Craft was going public. That education emphasized study of the seven liberal arts and sciences, referred to collectively as the Trivium (logic, grammar, and rhetoric) and Quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music).

The final third of this work applies steganography, a form of cryptography, to ferret out "twenty-five Signposts" indicating the founders' awareness of using a form of spiritual alchemy in Masonic Ritual. Steganography often uses deliberate errors aimed at the known culture of an audience to alert that audience to the sophistication of a work's author. Earnshaw cites several examples of steganography in Masonic Ritual on his way to his final thesis.

The Masonic Founders' audience, due to their education, would know that it was Archimedes who exclaimed "Eureka" upon his discovery that the weight and density of an object can be determined from the quantity of water it displaces. The Ritual names Pythagoras, inventor of the 47th Problem of Euclid, as the exclainer. Also, how could Pythagoras be a "brother" if he lived around 500 BCE? The classically educated candidate would recognize such errors and keep them to himself outside the Lodge, thereby preserving the "secrets" of the fraternity. Earnshaw cites several examples of steganography in Masonic Ritual on his way to his final thesis.

The author writes: "There are twenty-four 'Signposts'... In this book, *Freemasonry and Spiritual Alchemy*, twenty Signposts are given, five are in the other two books." He then describes six numbered signposts for the First Degree, seven for the Second, and seven for the Third Degree.

This does indeed total twenty, but meanwhile notice that he *misnames his own book*, and in the same paragraph where he says there are twenty-four Signposts, he names twenty, and apparently five more are in his other two books. Welcome to the dizzying world of steganography—it conceals the truth from the profane

by committing obvious errors expected to be known to the adept.

Earnshaw should know the title of his own book and as well as the number of Signposts from one sentence to another, but the alchemist reader recognizes a brother alchemist by these deliberate errors which are *not mistakes*.

As Brother Earnshaw states several times, “Masonry is about the journey, not the destination.” Masonic Light remains far from complete when the candidate receives “more” light.

By making the arcane subjects of alchemy, Rosicrucianism, and the topics of Renaissance education so lucid and accessible, Brother Earnshaw succeeds in providing Master Masons with valuable and *additional* Light in Masonry.

—William A. Parks, Jr., 33°

**Gan, Richard L., & Newman, Aubrey, *Finding the Mark: The Collected Grand Stewards' Lectures, Lewis Masonic, 2019, 400 pages + 16 color inserts, hardcover, ISBN-13: 978-0853185673. £25.00 (Approximately \$32.00), available online at LewisMasonic.co.UK, www.maco.com.***

This book is a collection of a series of lectures given from 2004 to 2018. According to the Introduction,

*It should be emphasized that these lectures were never intended to be a history of the Mark Masters' Degree in England and Wales and its Dominions and Possessions Overseas. Rather, the intention has always been to allow each lecturer to study a particular aspect of the Order and to place the result into the overall developing pattern.*

The range of lecture subject matter in this book is very wide, considering that it is confined to Mark Masonry. I appreciate especially the different approaches taken to this subject. Perhaps this is because the degree is not as exciting as many others, but Mark Masonry has never particularly interested me. To be sure, not everyone's interests may match mine, but I found a couple of the papers to be a nice change of pace. For example, one short chapter deals with “The Pictorial Heritage of the Golden Age of Mark Masonry.” The writer says that

The United Kingdom holds in its galleries and civic buildings arguably the greatest publicly owned collection of oil paintings [200,000] in the world. ... Over the last few years the Public Catalogue Foundation (PCF) has been photographing these paintings and collating information about each painting... Mark Masons' Hall is one of 128 participating organizations in the Greater London area. All the 54 paintings at Mark Mason's Hall have been photographed and catalogued.”

Then unfolds a story of nine portraits in particular. Each of the subjects in the painting is described. I might not have been interested in any random person in the paintings previously, but the Mark Masons' Hall's participation in this preservation program gave me a reason to read the short bios. I also read in horror: “What can only be described as an act of absolute vandalism took place as a consequence of the move from Kingsway to Upper Brook Street. In order to fit the staircase, in the new premises, five of the portraits ... were cut almost in half and the lower half of the canvas discarded!” This is a fine cautionary tale for preservation; it is also a success story, as restoration to some extent was possible via later digitization. Needless to say, we can surely all relate to our regret in having destroyed or discarded something whose importance we only realized later.

Another very short paper was written by the President of the General Board for Mark Masonry in England. Many Masonic bodies have a Board of General Purposes or something similar which acts as an Executive Committee. I hardly thought I would find myself interested in learning about the administration of the Board. It turns out, however, that hearing from a Board President himself about what his duties are and are not was an unexpectedly welcome diversion from ritual and organizational history.

This paper offers a rare glimpse into inner workings written contemporaneously with a term in office, an unusual sort of paper seldom found in Masonic collections.

All in all, Richard L. Gan and Aubrey Newman may have produced a niche book, but they managed to “find the mark.” •

—Daniel Gardiner, 32°

