

*WAS DEAN SWIFT A FREEMASON?*

In the review which appeared in the *Freemason* of the 10th September, 1898, of the latest, but by no means the least important, of the works for which we are indebted to the pen of Bro. HENRY SADLER — “*Masonic Reprints and Historical Revelations*,” published by Bro. GEORGE KENNING, 16 and 16A, Great Queen-street, W.C. — we announced our intention of reverting to the work at no distant date, and bringing more prominently to the notice of our readers those portions of it with which even the most enlightened brother would of necessity be least familiar. But in the meantime other matters which could not be postponed occupied our attention, and it is only now that we find ourselves in a position to redeem our promise.

Probably the least known, and yet at the same time one of the most valuable of Bro. SADLER’S “*Reprints*,” is the “*Letter from the Grand Mistress of the Female Free-masons*,” which has been taken by Bro. CHETWODE CRAWLEY as the text for the Introductory Chapter, which Bro. SADLER himself describes in his Preface as an “*exhaustive and scholarly contribution*.” In this chapter Bro. CRAWLEY has set himself what at this distance of time and with the imperfect material at his command, every one must regard as the difficult task of proving that Dean Swift was a Freemason. Inquiries into matters of this kind occupy an almost endless amount of time, and cause an endless amount of trouble, and they are attended with this further disadvantage—that in far too many cases the time and trouble are wasted. In this instance, however, the inquiry has resulted satisfactorily, and, in our opinion, Bro. CRAWLEY has succeeded in demonstrating his case to “*a moral certainty*,” or, to employ his own form of expression, that the circumstances he has unearthed are such as “*to invest the case with that highest kind of probability which we call moral certainty, and which falls short of legal certainty, only through deficiency of technically legal evidence*.” It would not be just to the writer to quote whole passages from this chapter in support of his contention, but a brief statement, firstly, of the facts, and then of the arguments which guide him to his conclusion, may legitimately be given.

There exist in the archives of our Grand Lodge three Registers or Lists of members covering the period from 1723 to 1733: these are “*the First (or 1713) List, the Second (or 1725) List, and the Third (or 1730) List*,” but all of them include names of persons admitted subsequently to the date of issue. The First and Second Lists are trustworthy, but the Third is so inexact of transcription, and so incomplete of enumeration that, as we are told, “*Bro. HENRY SADLER has come to the conclusion that the 1723 and 1725 lists were written in the register by the Grand Secretary himself, while the 1730 list was written by a*

clerk, or scrivener, who evidently knew little or nothing about the identity of the people whose names he was copying.” Many of the names, “*correctly entered in the previous lists*,” being “*wrongly spelled by the uninterested or unintelligent clerk who copied out the 1730 list*.” It is in the last of these three lists that Bro. SADLER discovered, in addition to that of “*Mr. ALEX. POPE*” the name of “*Mr. JOHN SWIFT*” in the roll of members of the lodge held at the “*Goat at foot of the Haymarket*,” while the name of JOHN ARBUTHNOT, with whom both POPE and SWIFT were on terms of the closest friendship, occurs in the 1725 list, among the members of the Lodge at “*the Bedford Head, Covent Garden*.” The arguments which Bro. CRAWLEY employs in order to prove that the “*Mr. JOHN SWIFT*” thus entered in the 1730 list is the immortal JONATHAN SWIFT, Dean of St. Patrick’s, are, to our mind, conclusive, in so far as they establish what has already been defined as a moral certainty. In the first place, as regards the probability of SWIFT having been a Freemason, Bro. CRAWLEY points out that the three distinguished men just mentioned were the leading members of “*a particular literary coterie, in which the rivalry of genius proved no bar to constancy of friendship*,” and, as he suggestively puts it, “*if any one member of it should be found amongst our Fraternity, we should look to find other members there too*.” Again, we are told that “*they—namely, ARBUTHNOT, POPE, and SWIFT—*” had been bound together for many years by the closest political and intellectual ties. They had formed in 1714 the *Martinus Scriblerus Club*, and pointedly addressed each other as *Brother*.” So far then as regards the probabilities of SWIFT having been a Mason, they are distinctly favourable to the proposition. Thus; ARBUTHNOT, POPE, and SWIFT, who were among the most distinguished literary men of their day were on the most intimate terms of friendship; they had been for ages united” by the closest political and intellectual ties; “*they had joined together in a certain year in forming a certain club, and they pointedly addressed each other as “Brother.”* It is shown by the register of members of certain of our lodges existent in their day that two of this illustrious trio—ARBUTHNOT and POPE—were Masons, and what inference more natural than that the remaining one of the three—SWIFT—was a Mason likewise? But these probabilities do not of themselves suffice to establish a moral certainty, and accordingly we travel a stage further, with the following result: In the Third (or 1730) List, among the names of the brethren returned as members of the Lodge held at “*the Goat at foot of the Haymarket*,” are found those of “*Mr. ALEX. POPE*” and “*Bro. JOHN SWIFT*.” But this list we are told is notorious not only for its “*incompleteness of enumeration*,” but also for its “*inexactness of transcription*.” With a solitary exception, all the members of this lodge, whatever may have been their

calling, have the title “Mr.” prefixed to their names, while, as regards the omission of SWIFT’S ecclesiastical designation,” Bro. CRAWLEY points out that in this respect the Clerk has served SWIFT no worse than others, and he cites the case of “the Rev. Dr. SAVAGE, of St. George’s, Hanover Square, a divine and scholar, whose memory is yet green at Westminster School,” who is described in the list of the lodge at the Goat as “Mr. JOHN SAVAGE.” Here, then, we have the case of a careless clerk or copyist, who, to use Bro. CRAWLEY’S own words, “evidently knew little or nothing about the identity of the people whose names he was copying,” interpreting the signature of the Dean of St. Patrick’s—“JON. SWIFT”—as “JOHN SWIFT,” and adding to the difficulty of identification by substituting the prefix “Mr.” for his true “ecclesiastical designation,” as he has also done in the case of another divine and scholar of the same period.

There is yet another circumstance to which we are desirous of calling attention before entering upon the third and final stage of the argument. Bro. CRAWLEY points out that “at this very time—1726 and 1727—Swift was in London, the guest of POPE, at Twickenham,” that is to say, during the earlier of the years covered by the 1730 list. “He sunned himself in the society of ARBUTHNOT and POPE, and shared with them all the convivialities of London, from which he had been so long absent. If they took part in Freemasonry we may be sure he joined them.” And this brings us to the final stage, in which the arguments appear to us to demonstrate to a “moral certainty” that SWIFT was a Mason. In the course of his researches Bro. CRAWLEY has had the good fortune to discover evidence that in the year 1688, the existence of Freemasonry, in its present speculative form, was so well known in the Irish capital, that the Society and its characteristics were made the subject of specific reference in “a Tripos or Speech delivered at a commencement in the University of Dublin, held there July 11, 1688, by JOHN JONES, then A.B., afterwards D.D.” In reference to this, Bro. CRAWLEY says, “it is impossible to credit SWIFT with any share in the composition,” but he adds “the real author and he were intimate, and the conditions of college life render it incredible that one should know and the other should not know the Society on which the main illustration of the Tripos depended.” Then only a few months before

SWIFT started for London, in 1726, the procession which accompanied the Earl of ROSSE, Grand Master, on St. John’s Day, 1725, passed through the streets of Dublin, starting from within a stone’s throw of the Deanery, so that it is incredible that it can have escaped the Dean’s notice. Lastly, there is the reprint which appears in Bro. SADLER’S book entitled “A Letter from the Grand Mistress of the Female Free-masons” which Bro. CRAWLEY holds to be “not a satire on Freemasonry, but a travesty of a pretended exposure of Freemasonry”—many of which had been published a few years earlier—and of which SWIFT was the writer. All these points, as successively taken up by Bro. CRAWLEY—the close friendship of SWIFT with ARBUTHNOT and POPE, who were both Masons; his familiarity with Freemasonry in early life and later—which appears to us to be undoubted; and his authorship of this “Letter from the Grand Mistress of the Female Free-masons,” all these appear to us to justify the conclusion at which Bro. CRAWLEY, after a most searching investigation, has arrived, namely, that it is “a moral certainty” that the “Mr. JOHN SWIFT,” of the 1730 List, and the famous JONATHAN SWIFT, Dean of St. Patrick’s, are one and the same person. We strongly recommend all who desire to estimate for themselves the merit of Bro. CRAWLEY’s proposition to study carefully the arguments by which he supports it in his Introductory Chapter to Bro. SADLER’S “Masonic Reprints and Historical Revelations,” to which we shall have occasion to again refer on some future occasion.

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The earliest known masonic reference to the beehive is found in an MS entitled *A Letter from the Grand Mistress of the Female Free-Masons to Mr. Harding the Printer*, found in the Halliday Collection, Royal Irish Academy, Dublin.