

Dudley Wright: A Brief Introduction

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The following is a condensed summary of just some of my findings to date about Dudley Wright. A much more detailed examination of his life and discourse, with a complete bibliography and list of archival sources, will be published in due course.

Dudley Wright (1868–1949) is today a relatively unknown character. When his name is recognized, it is generally by those interested in the traditions, legends and history of Freemasonry. However, he was a prolific author who wrote on diverse subjects. For example, in addition to his works on Freemasonry, he also published many articles and books on comparative religion. Jews and Judaism featured prominently, but also Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Druidism, and various mystical traditions. He also published articles and books on myths and legends, many of which concerned King Solomon and the Great Temple. In addition to religion and ancient myths, he also had a keen interest in psychic phenomena, the occult, and the preternatural. He was the editor of the *Annals of Psychological Science* in 1909 and 1910, and he published esoteric studies of the history and geography of vampire and ghost myths. He published well over a dozen books and hundreds of articles in several periodicals, including the *Freemason*, the *Masonic News*, the *Jewish Guardian*, the *Jewish Chronicle*, the *Islamic Review*, the *Bible Review*, and *Our Lady of Sion*. He was also editor of the *Freemason* and the *Masonic News*.

Dudley Wright admired Judaism and wrote a number of positive articles about Jews throughout the 1920s. He published several articles and letters in two important Anglo-Jewish newspapers, the *Jewish Guardian* and the *Jewish Chronicle*. These articles condemned prejudice against Jews, discussed Jews who had played important roles in Masonic lodges, and emphasised the role of Jewish legends and symbols in Freemasonry. He published similar articles in the *Masonic News*. He subsequently combined these and other articles into a booklet entitled *The Jew and Freemasonry* (1930). In 1932, Wright published a book entitled *The Talmud* (the book was identified as “in press” as early as 1925, but for some reason it was not published until 1932). His examination was full of praise for the Talmud. The final chapter examined several incidents of the confiscation, censorship, purging and destruction of the Talmud, from the thirteenth- to the eighteenth-century. He suggested that in nearly every case the approval of the Pope or Inquisition could be found. Herbert Loewe, Reader in Rabbinics and Hebrew at Cambridge University, praised Wright’s study of the Talmud, and Rabbi Dr Isidore Epstein, a prominent Jewish communal leader, referred to him as “a scholar whom we are glad to welcome among the small band of the *Chassidé Umot Haolam* to which belong Strack, Moore and Herford. His is a work of true love and piety.” (*Jewish Chronicle* 7 October 1932, p.16). Whilst the phrase, *Chassidé Umot Haolam*, had not taken on its post-Holocaust meaning of a non-Jew who had risked their life to save Jews from extermination, it was still a significant compliment.

Wright also published a book and several articles which were highly critical of Roman Catholicism during the 1920s. In 1921, Wright published nine essays which criticised Catholicism in *The Builder*, and in 1922, he published a book based on these

essays (*Roman Catholicism and Freemasonry*, 1922). These examined numerous incidents, publications and declarations of anti-Masonic hostility by Catholic laymen, priests, bishops, and cardinals. It quoted at length from encyclicals and pastoral letters by several popes, each of which condemned Freemasonry, and prohibited Catholics from being members of Masonic lodges under the threat of *ipso facto* excommunication. Wright argued in a series of articles throughout the rest of the 1920s, that the Catholic Church was engaged in bitter warfare against Freemasonry.

Despite these critiques, he drifted away from Freemasonry in 1931-2, and embraced Catholicism in 1932-3. His membership to the Wellesley lodge ceased in 1931. His membership to the Eccleston Lodge was terminated in November 1932. He joined the Catholic Guild of Israel, an organisation dedicated to the conversion of Jews, on 28 October 1933. After he joined the Catholic Guild of Israel, he no longer criticised the Church, and instead wrote several articles and letters that were critical of Jews and Judaism. On 12 February 1934, Wright wrote a letter to Sister Mary Pancratius, the head of the Sisters of Zion in London, to explain that he was working on a book which he proposed to call “Judaism v Rome” (letter in CGI archives, London). The book was never published, but he enclosed with the letter a 36 page draft manuscript for a chapter entitled “The Spanish Inquisition and the Jews” (manuscript in CGI archives). Whilst Wright was not totally uncritical of the Spanish Inquisition, he now repeated traditional stereotypes about Jewish usury, power and conspiracy, observing that the Jews dominated finance, and had become rich and powerful as a result. The draft chapter also argued that in 1485, “a conspiracy of the Jews was discovered at Toledo, the object of which was nothing less than the seizure of the city on Corpus Christi Day and the murder of all the Christians” (“The Spanish Inquisition and the Jews”, undated, p.24). In spring 1934, Wright wrote an article for *Our Lady of Zion* entitled “Some Papal Edicts against Judaism.” In this article, Wright defended edicts prohibiting Jews from employing Christians. Furthermore, whereas previously Wright fervently defended the Talmud, he now expressed concerns about it. “There was,” he argued, “abundant justification for the reiterated condemnations of the Talmud.” According to Wright, there were passages in the Talmud which “contained the most abominable and scurrilous statements concerning Our Blessed Lord and overlaying His Mother with vile accusations.” (“Some Papal Edicts against Judaism,” *Our Lady of Zion*, Spring 1934, p.12). In 1935, he repeated these arguments in a booklet entitled *The Catholic Church and the Jews*. However, in addition to the Talmud, he now claimed that Jewish liturgy and literature in general contained passages demonstrating “venomous hatred” towards Jesus (*The Catholic Church and the Jews*, 1935, p.13).

It seems clear that Wright’s transition from Freemasonry to Roman Catholicism was accompanied by a significant shift in his discourse. Significantly, this was not the only major transition in Dudley Wright’s life and discourse. In the early 1940s he abandoned Catholicism, embraced Islam, and took the name Muhammad Sadiq Dudley Wright. From 1944 to 1948, he published approximately twenty articles in a periodical entitled the *Islamic Review*. Many of his articles in the *Islamic Review* were critical of Christianity. He frequently praised the teachings of Jesus, but he suggested that Christianity had, unlike Islam, departed from Jesus’ teachings. Interestingly, his discourse about Jews and Judaism almost disappeared from his writings after he converted to Islam.