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MASONRY! A SPIRITUAL QUEST

Wor. Bro. E. C. Dawson, P. Prov. G.W.P.M. St. Augustine Lodge No. 4 and Associate Member Masters' and Past Masters' Lodge No. 130.

"SINCE SYMMETRY BEGAN AND HARMONY DISPLAYED
HER CHARMS OUR ORDER HAS HAD A BEING".

We live in an age where the search for truth, light and wisdom has never been paralleled. Humanity everywhere is seeking for that which will establish strength and stability. Surely there exists some guide in our progress towards the East whence all light and life emanates. Are there not landmarks found which will suffice to help the pilgrim on his way, safeguarding him as he stumbles in the darkness?

That guide is a formulation of the wisdom teaching of the ages, which meets a universal need based on a foundation of brotherhood and broad tolerance, at the same time placing emphasis upon the essentials which all can accept.

The tenets and principles of Freemasonry are a medium which presents truth and light so universally, on a platform so vast, that it is able to meet a world-wide need. Its recognition as a fraternity is so well known that very often the truths which it imparts are overlooked in the importance attached to its form aspect.

It is questionable whether a time has ever been when Masonry did not exist in some form or other. To the student of Masonry who seeks the knowledge which its rituals convey, and who can understand the spiritual significance the symbols, furniture and equipment of the lodge, and also appreciates the underlying import of the work on the floor of the temple, it will gradually become apparent that Masonry is the custodian of an inclusive presentation of truth. Masonry through its symbolic form has presented to humanity a revelation that will be the key to the mystery of the universe itself, and a guidance which will enable man to arrive at the heart of that mystery which is HIMSELF.

If all the varying presentations of truth throughout the world were lost, and orthodox religions and philosophies came to an end, many earnest thinkers are of the opinion that it would be possible to offset that loss through an understanding of Freemasonry.

A study of Masonic symbology and a practical application of the morality and ethics it inculcates make it possible to recover all that a man needs to know about God and His methods and laws in the economy of the Universe, and also to ascertain the relation of the individual soul of man to the Oversoul; and the connection existing between that unit which forms part of the great unfolding plan of the Temple, and the Great Architect who is revealing His idea throughout the entire edifice.

There are two paths of approach which demonstrate the fact or fallacy of the above contention. One would be to trace this body of truth in its progress through the centuries, and by the finding of the ancient landmarks demonstrate the continuity of the teaching, and its universal application. Secondly to take it in its present form and show how the truth it embodies, and the teaching it imparts, are capable of universal application, and present a logical foundation upon which humanity can build.

Both paths have been trodden initially, though not as yet to their conclusion. The aim is to show the inclusiveness and essentiality of the Masonic Platform, and to illustrate that if Masonry throughout the world can be awakened to its responsibility, and enter into its spiritual heritage, there can emerge out of the present "darkness", a hope and light for seekers everywhere.

A Temple can arise on earth whose doors will open so wide, that all men will enter therein, and the message which will sound forth from within its precincts, will be one of liberty, fraternity and equality...liberty of thought, brotherliness of attitude, and equality, of opportunity... based upon a oneness or origin, endeavour and of goal.

Masonry is a "Peculiar System of Morality" veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols. A system is a definite working out of a plan, the carrying forward of a project, with a specific end in view. The end of which the system of morality inculcated in Masonry is working, is the taking of the rough stone from the quarry, the rough ashlar, and by the use of the working tools of a Mason, turn it into the perfect ashlar, fit to take its place in the Temple of King Solomon and there become a "Living Stone".

The entered apprentice in his work undergoes many trials in his towards the light. He has to learn his craft, work at it assiduously before he becomes a Master workman. Eventually he perfects his technique, and merits the title Master Mason, thereby attaining the highest degree in Masonry, Master of Wisdom, a Builder under the G.A.O.T.U. Such is the goal of Masonry, and the great destiny of every candidate who partakes of its mysteries. To become a column in the Temple of Solomon. or as the Volume of the Sacred Laws states "to become a Pillar in the Temple of my God, and he shall no more go out".

Morality is the ability to choose between right and wrong, and the power to discriminate wisely. In the training of the candidate it is significant that the freedom of his will is emphasised - he comes to the door of the Lodge of his own Freewill and Accord, humbly soliciting to be admitted into an Antient Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons.

An Allegory is a pictorial presentation of some underlying fact, which the knowers of God down the ages thought and experienced. In the sublime allegories of Masonry there is pictured for us the working of the Laws of God, demonstrating in nature and in man the truths relating to man's unfolding consciousness his path and ultimate destiny.

The sublime degree of a Master Mason portrays that for which "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth together in pain, waiting for the

manifestation of the Sons of God", for only a son of God can be raised from the dead in the peculiar fivefold manner in which the Master Builder was raised.

Masonic symbolism is capable of extensive interpretation, illustrated by signs, passwords, grips and working tools, and in the significance of its Greater and Lesser lights, there is presented to the initiated those esoteric truths every man needs to know to find his way "out of the darkness in to the light" from death to immortality, from the unreal to the real.

Masonry, it can be said teaches the highest standards of ethics, which if put into practice in daily living, results in the conscious unfolding of man's divinity.

What is true of the individual is true of the group, and in Masonry preserved for all, is a guarantee of the ultimate achievement of humanity - PERFECTION!

Masonry is a pictorial presentation of the Great Quest! Instinctive in every man is that urge towards knowledge and expression, characteristic of the human kingdom, and which is the mark of his true nature. This truth is hidden for us in the significance in the name of our Master Hiram Abiff, for Hiram is derived "Khi,-living;" and Ram "that which is raised, or be lifted up".

"If I be lifted up" said the Great Carpenter of Nazareth, "will draw all men unto me". In these words, is found a clue to the central mystery of Masonry. "Abiff" signifies Father, which is the term given in all religions to the Great Spirit aspect. Thus the Quest is typified in these three ways through the three degrees – first by the steady advancement of the candidate towards the East. He learns through the knowledge which is imparted to be found. The truth concerning the quest for Divine Light has been expressed in allegory as follows:

"There was a time in the history of the race when the Gods stole from man his divinity and meeting in high conclave sought to decide where to hide that which had been stolen. One God suggested hiding it in another Planet, another God arose and said that man was innately a great traveller, and they had no guarantee that eventually he might find his way there. "Let us," he

said, hide it in the depth of the sea”, but again there were dissenting voices, so the discussion went back and forth until at last one bright God arose and said, "Let us hide the stolen jewel of man's Divinity within himself, for there he will never look for it". Whereupon the conclave ended, and for aeons it seemed as if the light hidden in man was lost forever.

Little by little however some men discovered the secret, and the knowledge they gained of how the “Light” could be found became known to certain groups of thinkers. Through religion and through Masonry the laws which govern the revelation of light were ascertained.

The quest for the Lost Words, the search for the Soul which is the true Son of the Widow, and the teaching of the three degrees is marvellously expressed for us in the words found in ancient manuscripts-

"Lead me from darkness to light"- first degree.

"Lead me from the unreal to the real"-the significance of the second degree.

“Lead me from death to Immortality"-a summation of the central fact of the third degree.

It is possible from a study of this facet of Masonic teaching to find all that is required for the basis a universal spiritual doctrine. Therefore, it could well be said that if all orthodox religions and philosophies disappeared and only Masonry were left, the great Plan of Salvation could be recovered. All true Masons should ponder this point for in the realm of religious thought today the most urgent need is for a presentation of the great spiritual truths which are inclusive, satisfying and free from sectarian connotations, that will reveal to all seeking Masons, that if Masonry is ever to achieve this ideal, it will be impossible for them to be against any race or creed.

We are so tired of differences, so weary of polemics based on religions, so confused by social, political and economic quarrels in every land. Separateness and its attendant problems are causing consternation in many countries. Hope lies in the Masonic Fraternity living up to its own constitution and truly embodying its own principles, thereby providing a meeting place and a platform of such breadth that all can meet and grow to a better understanding of each other's views and aims.

Masonry teaches by the "living voice of the sign" and on this basis of teaching there can be no imposed authority or dictatorship, for each is to interpret the sign or symbol as best he can and grow by his own efforts.

It has been said that "God hath made mankind one vast brotherhood, Him- and the world His Lodge". There is the vision and the ideal...one vast Fraternity, each member cooperating one with another in the Plan for the building of that Fraternity, and each attending to his own task with T.G.A.O.T.U. as the W.M.

All Freemasons must realise the true significance of their obligations. The Masonic Fraternity has in its own hands an opportunity and a usefulness which is often overlooked by many who comprise its membership.

The restless people of the world are looking for wise leadership based on principles such as are laid down by the Craft. By its example and above all, attitudes of each individual Mason the teaching of the Craft are exemplified.

Freemasonry can in our time be an inspiration to others living in darkness, if each Mason realises that the search for light on his part has to be self-initiated, and he himself must go in search of the Lost Word.

There are many voices calling to us to take up anew the ancient quest for light....Masonry in essence and by virtue of its source is spiritual, and the Great Masonic Quest is a spiritual and therefore a mystic quest.

A NEW DAY DAWNS, A NEW AGE IS WITH US, THE BREATH OF GOD IS
UPON OUR ORDER.

Discussion.

V. Wor. Bro. H. M. Minson, P.M., said that the paper was well read and easy to follow.

Bro. H Hammersley, Associate, said that he commended Wor. Bro. Dawson for the thoughts expressed in the paper. We did not practice the principles of Freemasonry fully. He asked how would we initiate Brethren into the Craft if they had no knowledge of God?

Wor. Bro. Dawson replied that he had said "if all religions should pass away". He did not say "if the V.S.L. were destroyed". Freemasonry could take the place of religion and other philosophies.

Wor. Bro. E. R. Edwards, Master, Concord Lodge No. 39, offered congratulations and said that this was quite an illuminating paper. It ties together the whole purpose of Freemasonry, and it had helped him in his understanding of Masonry.

Wor. Bro. K. Cockburn, Steward, offered congratulations and said that the paper was elevating and gave food for thought, especially in the references to peace and tranquillity.

Ross Hepburn, P.M., said: The title of the paper "Masonry-a Spiritual Quest" is a rather forbidding one. It reminds us that there are some Masonic writers who tend to over-emphasise the spiritual side of Freemasonry and to make heavy weather of it. They indulge in fanciful interpretations of symbolism and write a great deal of mystical nonsense which is over the head of the average Mason.

The late Wor. Bro. Lionel Vibert described these people by saying that they magnify Freemasonry into a kind of world religion and that they seek "to erect upon our simple Craft a towering edifice of philosophical and mystical speculation where merely annoys the plain man".

Wor. Bro. Dawson has avoided these extremes and has given us a good practical paper on a rather difficult subject, though even in places his statements are not always easy to follow. I understand that he has based his paper on an American book and has "translated" the material into Masonic

language which is intelligible to us in New Zealand - as some of the American terms and expressions are unfamiliar to us.

It should be emphasised that Freemasonry is a system of morality. It is not a religion or a church or a substitute for a church. Every Brother should worship according to his own denomination.

The paper includes a reference to charity and tolerance. From the discussion at the last meeting on the paper by Wor. Bro. Loftus, it is obvious that the Brethren are very much interested in subjects like charity and tolerance, which are matters within our everyday experience.

I take exception to the suggestion that there has always been some kind of Freemasonry.

Actually, Freemasonry is of British growth on British soil. It is derived from the Operative Lodges of stonemasons in England and Scotland in the Middle Ages and cannot be traced further back than the 14th century. The earliest records of Operative Masonry in England are the Regius Manuscript of 1390 and the Cooke Manuscript of about 1420. These are the earliest of the series of documents known as the Old Charges which served the combined purpose of a Charter, Book of Constitution and Ritual for the admission of Operative Masons. So far as Masonic History is concerned, events taking place before 1390 or outside England and Scotland are to be considered as legend.

The Third Degree emphasises the search for that which was lost. The answer is supplied in the Royal Arch Degree, which is recognised by Rule 326 of the Book of Constitution as part of pure antient Freemasonry. Unfortunately, only a comparatively small proportion of Brethren take advantage of the opportunity of making an advancement in Masonic knowledge by joining a Royal Arch Chapter.

This comment is not intended as a criticism of the paper but rather as a contribution to the discussion.

Editor's Note. The discussion on Wor. Bro. Dawson's paper was rather disappointing, and it was considerably less than we usually have. This no doubt was due to the nature of the paper, which most Brethren did not feel

competent to offer comment on, apart from expressing appreciation and congratulations. It so happened also, that four or five of the Past Masters of the Lodge, who would normally offer useful comments, were not present on this occasion.

Wor. Bro. Dawson, in reply, said that he appreciated the comments made by the Brethren. He realised that the paper was of a nature that would not cause a great deal of discussion, but he was very pleased with the attendance obvious interest shown by the Brethren in his paper.