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SYMBOLISM.

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Why is a truth concealed more important than one clearly revealed? Why is a hint of more value than a demonstration? Meditation, reflection and study are required to develop and appreciate the great truths, and just in proportion as we meditate do, we develop. Things that are seen are temporal and fleeting, while those that are unseen are spiritual and eternal. Mohammed meditated in a cave many years before he proclaimed his great truth. Paul spent twelve years in meditation after his conversion, but before his ministry. The man of Galilee spent eighteen years in meditation before he began his endeavours to reform the philosophy of his people. Confucius, Akhenaten, Buddha and Moses all spent many years in study and meditation whereby they sought an understanding of the great philosophies of life.

Of the several sub-divisions of this great principle, we, as Freemasons, are particularly interested in that sub-division denominated symbols. Symbolism is the fundamental principle in our peculiar method of giving instructions. An inquiry into the symbolism of Freemasonry means an investigation of the institution itself, for without its symbols the institution would cease to be. a science of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols. Before considering symbols of Freemasonry let us make a short general survey of the science itself.

Symbolism is the use of symbols, not merely those of the figures of speech but those of all language, since the word symbolizes the idea, and the idea symbolizes the thing. Any word has invariably at least two meanings, one of

which is more remote and archaic than the other. The word “spirit” used in the religious sense, has not now as it once had, the meaning “breath”.

Modern psychology has resolved the abstractness of symbolism into a concrete explanation. There is found in the human psyche a double stream of mentality, the conscious and the unconscious. The ordinary person is quite ignorant of the vanished or obsolete meanings of all the words he uses, so he is generally uninformed concerning the stream of the unconscious. Thus, symbolism may be defined as the deeper meaning possessed by words and things, by virtue of which they become dynamic. The more symbolic a thing is the more effect it will have upon human action. The significance of dynamic power of any symbol depends upon the individual's knowledge of its history, and it acquires significance in proportion as that history, which has been in the subconscious, is brought more and more into consciousness. The progressive revelation of a symbol, and especially its philosophical and esoteric explanations, theretofore hidden in the subconscious stream of mentality, meets with ever delightful recognition as the conscious mind grasps the fullness and completeness of it. It is this translation into clear understanding that makes the symbol dynamic.

Symbolism extends, of course, to things other than words; things that convey by appropriate interpretation a counter-balance and harmony of ideas to the human understanding, and may be a picture, mark, token, signal, sign or word displayed in a singular way.

Symbolism is a method of instruction, the symbol being the vehicle to convey an idea or impression; a sign by which one knows or infers a thing; that which stands for or represents something else; a visible sign of an idea; a method of conveying intelligence without the use of abstract language; a method which not only conveys intelligence, but which impresses the idea on the mind of the subject; it is even more than that - it not only impresses the idea but creates an emotional feeling or a feeling that may be said to be even a spiritual one. An impression that thrills the soul - an inspiration; thus, symbols or emblems is that manner of impressing an idea or feeling of emotion which is derived from the comparison of some object with a moral conception or attribute.

Thus, the plumb is the symbol of rectitude; the olive branch the symbol of peace; the skull and crossbones the symbol of danger; the beehive a symbol of industry; the cross the symbol of Christianity, and the spotless white apron the symbol of purity of life and conduct. The meaning of symbols is not inherent or self-evident, but have been ascribed and must therefore be explained, although the meanings ascribed to a given symbol are often suggested by it, thus the Lion would never have been considered the symbol of strength and courage had not its actual strength and courage been proverbial.

The plumb becomes to the Mason after he has been shown its symbolic meaning, forever after, as the visible expression of the idea of rectitude or uprightness of conduct.

In the science of symbology whereby a principle, thought or idea is sought to be conveyed by some object or symbol and which practice prevailed almost exclusively in the promotion of the early religions, we should take care not to lose sight of the meaning intended to be conveyed. Thus the Priests of Egypt sought to impress upon their people the virtue of being fleet of foot, which was very important in their lives. This virtue was symbolized by the dog whose fleetness is well known; eventually the people lost sight of the attribute which the dog symbolized and worshipped the dog itself. The same is true of the sacred bull of Egypt.

To study and compare these visible objects, to elicit from them the moral philosophy they are intended to express, is to make oneself acquainted with the symbolism of Freemasonry.

The amount of intelligence or emotion depends upon our knowledge or training concerning the symbol. Thus, you may be in a foreign city and see the ships come into port flying the flags of their respective nations, which calls to your mind some historical fact or characteristic of that nation. However, let a ship approach flying the Stars and Stripes, you are not only informed thereby that such a ship is of the United States, but you are unconsciously thrilled and inspired by having brought to your mind the many things that that flag stands for - free country, free schools, free speech and press, rights of life, liberty, property and the pursuit of happiness, security of

the fireside and all those institutions dear to our hearts. That is symbolism – a method of conveying impressions to you without the use of the written or spoken language.

Symbolism is a concrete form of instruction as distinguished from abstract instructions; symbols are generally classed as of three kinds. First, material objects second, pictures or representations of material objects; and third, parables of mental pictures-that is, spoken or verbal symbols.

Let us illustrate the difference between abstract teachings and concrete teachings by symbols or allegories; a simple admonition to a class of boys or girls that "you should always be kind to everyone; you should visit the sick, comfort the sorrowing, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, say no harsh words, but be gentle and charitable and do all you can to make others happy," this is abstract

In giving concrete instructions to the same class with the use of a mental picture or symbol, we would follow the method of McGuffey something like this. "Once upon a time there was a little girl named Mary about ten years old, who lived with her parents in the country; she had a little sister and two big brothers; her grandmother lived about a half mile away. One bright June morning her mother told her she could visit her grandmother; she put on her pretty blue dress and her pink bonnet and got ready for the journey. She was to take a basket to her grandmother which contained some bread, some meat, and some tea. The sun shone brightly, the birds were singing merrily, and she was full of joy. She had gone far when she met an old lady who seemed to be kindly to her and told her where she was going. The old lady told her she was a widow and her son had gone away from home some weeks before to earn money for them and that he had not returned, and that she had not heard from him; that all her food was gone and she had come into the highway hoping someone would help her. The little girl said, "I have some bread and meat and tea which I taking to Grandma, and which I will divide with you." "God bless you my child," said the old lady, "but are you sure your grandmother will not be angry and scold you?" "Oh no," said the little girl, and she gave a portion to the old lady, who with tears in her eyes thanked her and bade her good-day. Mary on arriving at the home of her grandmother related what had happened. "You are a dear good child," said her

grandmother. "I am so glad you helped the old lady." This filled her heart with joy, and when she concluded her visit and returned to her home and told her parents all that had happened, they were all very happy."

Most children hearing this parable will see in their mind's eye themselves acting the part of the good little girl and will be deeply impressed with the lesson of kindness that it teaches and will follow it when occasion arises; this is symbolic instruction; hundreds of years of experience have taught that as between abstract and concrete instruction the latter makes the deeper and more lasting impression upon the mind.

Meanings may be conveyed by symbols which cannot with equal force be transmitted by written or spoken words. Herodotus relates the story of a messenger sent by the Scythians to Darius when this Persian Monarch sought to invade the lands of the Scythians with his army of conquest. The messenger from the Scythians carried into the Persian camp and presented to the Monarch the body of a bird, of a mouse, and of a frog, together with a bundle of five arrows. When it was interpreted to mean that unless the Persian could learn to fly through the air like birds, to burrow through the earth like mice, and to dive through the water like frogs, they would not be able to escape the arrows of the Scythians, the Persian King retreated to his own country. History relates a similar incident nearer home. While the English settlement in Massachusetts was in its infancy (1621) a messenger from Canonibus, Chief of the Narragansett Indians, appeared and presented a bundle of arrows tied with a rattlesnake skin. Governor Bradford, who received the message, filled the skin with gunpowder and leaden balls, and returned it by the same messenger. This symbolic reply so impressed the Indians that war was averted.

Symbols as a method of instruction have been in use from the earliest times; early Christianity developed a great system of symbolism. At an earlier period, the disciples of Mithra and Zoroaster, as well as the Egyptians, communicated their philosophy by symbols. The wisdom of the Chaldeans, Phoenicians, Egyptians, Jews, of Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Pliny, and most of the ancients that we have received, is symbolic.

The objective character of a symbol which presents something material to the mind by sight, touch or hearing as conveying an idea or impression is best calculated to be grasped by the untrained mind; so that, at an early time when people were uneducated practically all learning was expressed in the form of symbols. The early religions were almost entirely symbolic because visible symbols were the most vivid means of acting upon the uneducated mind. In Freemasonry all the instructions in its mysteries are communicated in the form of symbols. Founded as a speculative science on an operative art it has taken the working tools of the stone cutter and builder which it spiritualizes, the terms of architecture, the Temple of Solomon, the Legend of Hiram Abif, and everything that is connected with its traditional history and adopting them as symbols, it teaches its great moral and psychological lessons by this system of symbolism of concrete instructions; but its symbols are not confined to material objects: its myths and legends, including the legend of Hiram Abif are all for the most part symbolic.

A legend conceived wholly in the imagination of men, and without any foundation in fact, may be the vehicle of some greater truth which it may impress upon the minds of men and thus make them wiser and better and happier.

The legends of Freemasonry are parables, and a parable is only a spoken symbol. By its utterance emotional and spiritual matters are better understood and make a deeper impression upon the attentive mind. Men's earliest instructions were by symbols. There is no science so ancient as that of symbolism, and no mode of instruction has ever been so general as was the symbolic instructions in former ages.

The first learning in the world consisted chiefly of symbols. The great and good man of Bethlehem instructed the multitudes by parables which are only verbal symbols. Thus, he said. "Behold a sower went forth to sow. etc.": "For the Kingdom of Heaven is as a man traveling in a far country"; "A certain man had two sons, etc."; "The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a certain King which made a marriage for his son, etc." in all these instances at no time was it pretended that these things happened, but it was the method the Master used to instruct his disciples and the multitudes. By reciting a supposed state of facts, he was able to convey to their hearts and minds meanings

which he could not convey to them by abstract language. In this method he was able to make a deep and lasting impression on them - nearly two thousand years have elapsed, and the impression thus made has not been lost.

To form parables and symbols and to interpret them was the chief occupation of the ancient Priesthoods. In order that we may understand the science of symbols as used by Freemasonry, and which constitutes the body of our science, we should have a general understanding of the background or conditions existing at the time they first began to be used. At the time of the formation of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717 the instructions recited to the candidates, as well as the writings of some devotees of the art, would have led them to believe that the institution of Freemasonry is as old as mankind; that it was founded in the Garden of Eden and that all the great personages in ancient history, including Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Solomon, Pythagoras and Euclid were Freemasons. We must differentiate between masonry as the art of building, and Freemasonry. Freemasonry is a speculative science, and although it be true that it grew out of the operative art of constructing buildings, there is no evidence that the speculative science has existed as long as the operative art. It may be that the principles have existed from all times, but that does not mean that the institution of Freemasonry which promulgates those principles, has existed for any such time. No doubt Adam in the Garden of Eden could have lifted a heavier stone by the use of a lever than without it, but we have no information that he had discovered that secret or made use of it. All the principles taught to-day in our schools of engineering have existed throughout all times, but their discovery and application are of quite recent date. The elements of arithmetic, like moral philosophy, are not inventions of man; they have existed from all time, but their application was only discovered by man, and that within recent periods.

Different meanings may be ascribed to the same symbol by different persons, - the happy result is that our institution does not have to suffer the pangs of dogmatism, - an affliction so common among the sectarians. Take for example the legend of Hiram Abif, or of the Third Degree, - this legend is a myth having no foundation in fact even, it relates to things concerning the

building of King Solomon's Temple, which are historically true. As heretofore stated there never was such a person as Hiram Abif; this symbol teaches the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul. Practically all the ancient mysteries contained a similar drama and intending to teach the same principles. To this may be added the further lesson in the building trade, which was the foundation of the institution. When an apprentice was entered into the Operative Lodge, he was taught the trade or building secrets and he was given to understand that they were his peculiar heritage, and that no one who had not served his apprenticeship and learned those secrets should be allowed to work with him; in other words it was the most perfect labour union the world has ever known, and when the instruction in moral principles was given to him by aid of symbols, those likewise became his peculiar heritage, and one of the fundamental principles among those workmen was that those secrets should be safely guarded and no eavesdropper or cowan should be permitted in their midst. Secrecy was one of the greatest Masonic virtues, and in order to impress this principle upon their apprentices they were not only told the parable of the death of the Grand Master, Hiram Abif, because he refused to divulge a secret, but that parable was dramatized and exemplified to make a deeper and more lasting impression upon him; in fact the apprentice was caused to take part in that drama and he himself be the chief actor therein, in order that the most profound impression might be made upon his mind, never to divulge the secrets of Freemasonry. Most vividly was he impressed with the fact that the Grand Master had lost his life in defence of his integrity.

This legend of Hiram Abif made its appearance in the Grand Lodge of England some eight or ten years after its organization (about 1725). Its author is unknown, but the two men who were most active in the Grand Lodge at that time were James Anderson, a Scotch Presbyterian Minister who wrote the Book of Constitutions in 1723, and a second edition in 1738, and who was a Grand Warden of the Grand Lodge; the other, John Theophilus Desaugliers, was a Frenchman but educated in Oxford, England; he was a fellow of the Royal Society and did much experimenting in steam engineering; he was Grand Master in 1720.

It is a fundamental principle that he who is so trained that he will study and observe these symbols and will keep these forms and ceremonies as they are exemplified will have the power to resist temptation and thus become a man of strong character, and one who will resist temptation and evil. By having constantly brought to our minds those principles of morality and virtue and friendship by the various symbols of Freemasonry and by observing those forms and ceremonies of our ancient institutions we are thereby unconsciously influenced to become better and happier. This article is a symbol.

DISCUSSION.

The W. Master: Wor. Bro. Layne has in his paper read this evening, given us a very instructive lesson on symbols and symbolism. It is only after two or three readings of the paper, that one begins to grasp the immensity of the subject dealt with so ably in such a short, concise paper.

It is only in the latter part of the paper that the symbolism of Freemasonry is particularly dealt with. Without that symbolism, our noble science would soon cease to be. Our symbols convey the same thoughts that many religions do, but whereas the latter convey those truths by parables, either written or spoken we convey ours entirely by symbols veiled in allegory. These appeal to the mind and are more easily remembered than the written word, always provided that the meaning of the symbol is grasped by adequate explanations, which carry the mind with them. Thus the study of the symbolism of Freemasonry should always be one of the most important objects with us. The symbolism of Freemasonry embraces the good of all religions, eliminating all tongues which must always create divisions among men. Freemasonry was created to unite men, and not divide them, leaving each one to think and fashion his own system of truth. All its power rests on three simple ideals - love of a supreme being, love of man for his fellows, and life everlasting.

A vast change of heart is now gradually growing upon the religious world by reason of interchange of thought between various religions, and an earnest endeavour is being made to find out how far one religion can reconcile itself with the others in things worthwhile and least open to debate. The difficulties are stupendous, but each successive conference is opening the way still more. The great meeting of churches at Oxford and Edinburgh are the latest examples of the keen desire of various religions to find a common font.

We may say that they are moving towards our Masonic position and when they arrive there Freemasonry will witness something that she has advocated and struggled to achieve.

Then the old feuds will be ended, old jealousies forgotten, and above all will stand out the simple truths of one great religion, the Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of Man, and the hope of Life Everlasting.

W. Bro. R. B. Cape-Williamson:- A most interesting paper and like a good fishing pool, better fish caught every time you cast.

Symbolism without the discerning mind and power of interpretation is mere weariness and waste time. Unfortunately, too many of us to-day cannot see the wood for the trees.

Why is a truth concealed more important than one clearly revealed? is the first question asked.

Do you remember the three Commands?

Knock and it shall be opened.

Seek and ye shall find.

Ask and ye shall receive.

Notice in each the reward comes after services rendered.

The unknown does not open with a brass band. It sets a price on itself.

In one section the lecturer says we should take care not to lose sight of the meaning intended to be conveyed. And instances the worship of the animal instead of the quality of the animal expressed. I have said before in this

Lodge that when we look at a brick we cannot see beyond nine by four inches of baked clay, forgetting attraction, cohesion and adhesion: and so with everything in life we should look for the eternal qualities expressed and not at the temporal fleeting object visible to the material eye or other organ of sense.

It is possible that we sometimes idolise the ritual and ritualist forgetting the virtues proclaimed in the one and lived by the other. A good ritualist draws the applause because of the spectacular appeal, but the humble little chap with a heart and mind of pure gold, who stutters and has to be prompted excites oft times resentment and impatience.

The referring of the body as a temple and its construction and maintenance as a perfect model, a reflection of the Great Architect, is of course our main symbolic theme.

The discussion of vanished and obsolete meanings to help us in this study is a very important paragraph. God in Icelandic language is spelt as good.

Chasteneth is regarded as a punishment in Biblical references when the true meaning is purification or correction.

Gave up the Ghost-breath—pneuma, and so on.

Read in the V.S.L. the story of Naaman and his healing from leprosy. The story symbolises humility and obedience. These virtues did the healing, not the washing in the river waters.

Bro. Dr. Ross Hepburn, Associate, said:-

The paper on symbolism by W. Bro. Carney M. Layne, is a valuable contribution to the literature of this Lodge and worthy of wide circulation among the Craft. Usually symbolism is considered in relation to some particular object such as the square, but the present paper discusses symbolism in general and throws a great deal of new light on the subject. Bro. Layne has dealt in an able and comprehensive manner with a difficult subject, and one upon which a great deal of nonsense has been written by

romantically minded people who go cheerfully ahead with the utmost disregard for the facts.

Bro. Layne has not made any extravagant claims about the antiquity of Speculative Freemasonry but keeps closely to the known facts on the subject and states nothing for which the evidence is not forthcoming. He admits quite frankly that Hiram Abif never existed but emphasises the importance of the legend as a valuable symbol. He points out the similarity between the legend and the drama contained in most of the Ancient mysteries but does not attempt to establish any romantic connection between those mysteries and Freemasonry.

He has kept strictly to the ascertained facts of Masonic history and has dealt with his subject in a way which proves him to be a sound and reliable Masonic student, and I hope that we will have more papers from him at a later date.

Bro. Lionel Vibert, Secretary of Quatuor Coronati Lodge, London, and one of the sanest of present-day Masonic writers, has pointed out that many worthy people think that the mere fact that you are a Freemason qualifies you to write about all manner of Masonic and antiquarian subjects without anything more than the slenderest previous acquaintance with the subjects themselves.

"It is from these people," he says, "that we get the most wonderful results by way of explanations of our ritual, our symbolism and our origins; explanations that are put forward categorically with the most perfect assurance. Their great stand-by is analogy, a hopelessly unsound basis for any deductions what-ever. The ascertained facts of our history are somewhat destructive theories or would be if they had any knowledge of them. But they ignore all difficulties of that sort; no mere fact is going to check their ardour or restrain their inventiveness."

Again, speaking of Folklore and primitive customs, Bro. Vibert says, "The subject is fascinating and most dangerous. It is also fatally easy, and more rubbish has been written on this head under the guise of Masonic enquiry than on any other branch of the subject except symbolism."

When there is so much of that sort of literature about, it is refreshing to have a paper on symbolism, of the type which Bro. Layne has written and which we have read to-night.

The Secretary:- Whilst agreeing with the comments that have been made in Bro. Carney M. Layne's interesting paper I am a little surprised that no reference was made to the definite statement contained therein that "there never was such a person as Hiram Abif." This is so definite as to lead one to inquire more closely, into the pros and cons for the existence of King Solomon's principal architect. In the first place the V.S.L. lies open in every English-speaking Masonic Lodge and all candidates are authoritatively informed on the threshold, as it were that it is the unerring standard of Truth and Justice. Now if we turn to 1 Kings VII v. 13, "and King Solomon sent, and fetched King Hiram out of Tyre." He was a widow's son of the tribe of Naphali - and he came to King Solomon and wrought all his work." 2 Chron. 11 and 13, which is considered to be a later record, confirms the statement, except that his mother is stated to be of the daughter of Dan. The word Abif is to be found in Coverdale's version of the Bible only and is usually translated father. It is true the V.S.L. contains no direct reference to the legend enshrined in our Ceremonies, but more than one Masonic writer has argued that the original records contained an inference that there were two Hiram's, father and son, who worked at the Temple, the latter taking the place of the former consequence of his sudden death. The late Bro. J. E. S. Tuckett, in a very able paper in Q.C. Transactions, presents considerable argument in favour of pre-1717 knowledge of Hiram and references to him in many old charges. These may not be conclusive to all students, but certainly a quantity of evidence is available in favour of the existence of Hiram and of his importance in the eyes of our operative brethren of mediaeval times.

A vote of thanks to W. Bro. Carney Layne was unanimously adopted.
