

ALBERT PIKE--THE MAN NOT THE MYTH

Editor's Note: On October 17 this article was given by Dr. Rex R. Hutchens as an address to the 1989 Biennial Session of The Supreme Council 33^o Southern Jurisdiction, USA., meeting in Washington, DC

Like a few equally illustrious predecessors, such as Leonardo Da Vinci or Francis Bacon, Grand Commander Albert Pike led not a single life, but many. He was an explorer, so he knew privation; a journalist, so he knew the excesses of the press; a lawyer, so he knew the constant threat of despotism that the law entails; a teacher, so he knew the importance of education; a general, so he knew the horrors of war; a poet, so he knew the soul of man.

His contributions to so many fields vividly demonstrate the productivity possible from the wise use of time. If he knew the exaltation of success, he also knew the meaning of misfortune. The civil war estranged him from his northern roots, so he knew despair; he was a father who outlived eight of his ten children, so he knew sorrow; he once possessed great wealth but died a virtual ward of the Scottish Rite. Yet he was a Mason, so he also knew the unrivaled power of the human will.

His life exemplified the teachings of the Craft, and all of us might envy his steady dedication to those principles. Few, if any, of us have lived so completely. He came to the Craft relatively late in life, at the age of forty, so Freemasonry can take little credit for his character. What it did provide, however, was an outlet for his energy and a vehicle for his creativity.

Though a man of many talents, no aspect of his life received such enduring concentration as his work for the Scottish Rite. He found it in ruins and left it a stately temple to the dignity and rights of man.

Above all else our illustrious Brother Pike taught us the meaning of leadership. No fair-weather friend of the Craft, he assumed the mantle at its lowest ebb: its membership nil, its ritual in chaos, its charities nonexistent.

Albert Pike assumed the intellectual leadership of the Scottish Rite even before he was elected as Sovereign Grand Commander. To him was entrusted the rewriting of the Rituals of the Degrees which either never existed in any coherent form or which had suffered degradation at the hands of the unlearned.

Albert Pike had a subtle motive in his rewriting of the Rituals, seeking to do more than simply improve the presentations of the lessons of the Degrees. He wished to establish the Scottish Rite as an agent for the intellectual development of the Craft. This goal was furthered by the preparation of a foundational literature for the Rite embodied in the new Ritual and a series of

lectures entitled Readings, Legends, Liturgies and Morals and Dogma. These were further supplemented by The Book of Words and the 1st and 2nd Lectures on Masonic Symbolism.

By the exercise of the proper tenor of leadership, he built upon the strength of Scottish Rite teachings, expunged the Ritual of its adversely political and sectarian character and set the Rite upon a course of growth and development that clearly had as its intent to make the Southern Jurisdiction the single most influential body of Freemasonry in the world.

He sought this goal by a steady application of strength and determination, mitigated by patience and self-control. He never forgot that ours is a volunteer organization, utterly dependent upon the good will and commitment of the membership who give to it time which deprives their employment, family, church and community of a portion of their talents. But he as well understood how that commitment of time and talent bore fruit in the character of the man, making him a better employee or employer, a better father or husband, a better churchman or citizen.

Brother Pike set forth certain precepts to guide the Mason in the conduct of his life. These may be found in Morals and Dogma in the Entered Apprentice Lecture as the ten commandments of Masonry and in the Prince of Mercy Lecture as the nine great truths of Masonry. But as Martin Luther noted, "Precepts show us what we ought

to do, but do not impart to us the power to do it." Pike's unique contribution was to impart to us also that power--the power of just government, the power of collective action, the power of truth.

This power is manifested in our actions. He reminded us that reward accorded to merit is a debt; without merit, it is an alms or a theft. From him we learned to make change without creating destruction; to practice charity without fostering dependence; to lead without tyranny; to counsel without criticism.

It is difficult to reflect upon the man without wondering what he would think of our present edifice, the foundation of which he laid. It is certain that he would find no fault with the extensive system of charities that has evolved over the years. He probably would have tolerated the changes in emphasis responsible for the rapid growth of the Scottish Rite in this century. After all, great charities require a broad membership base to support them. He did not hold the rules he devised for the government of the Rite to be inviolate; he changed them often himself.

Equally evident would have been his deep disappointment in the numerous versions of the Ritual in use within the Rite today.

In contravention of the edicts of The Supreme Council, our Ritual has been continually reworked and elaborated or simplified by sincere, hardworking, dedicated Brethren who all too often have had only the vaguest notion of the intent of the original Ritual. The result has been the corruption of Scottish Rite teachings. The sublime lessons portrayed in our original Ritual have become so simplified or, more accurately, diluted, that the experience of receiving the Degrees has become, for many, a numbing rather than an uplifting experience.

Brother Pike knew that this eventuality was possible, even inevitable, if the sanctity of the Ritual was not preserved from additions by the unlearned. Thus, the authority for the changes in the Ritual was confined to The Supreme Council itself through its Committee on Ritual and Ceremonial Forms, instead of the dozens of Orients, hundreds of Valleys or the now 600,000 plus members of the Rite in his Jurisdiction.

The lack of enforcement of his formally instituted controls over the Ritual of the Rite has resulted in just the changes Brother Pike feared and just the consequences he anticipated.

He would also have been disappointed in the waning of his goal that the Scottish Rite become the agent for the intellectual leadership of the Craft. It is in the area of Masonic research that this trend is clearly seen. There is an almost total absence of Scottish Rite research to be found in the literature. Those few research papers and books which are found usually treat of minor historical matters rather than any analysis of the symbols and teachings of the Scottish Rite. Until this shortcoming is corrected, we shall never attain that influence in the intellectual life of Freemasonry that he sought.

The spirit of Brother Pike bids us to protect from corruption those lessons from ancient history which he gave to us and to reassert his goal of contributing to the intellectual leadership of the Craft. His wise counsel pervades the literature of the Scottish Rite, even in those jurisdictions where his Rituals are not used.

It is often said today that no one reads Pike's writings anymore. This is, of course, an exaggeration. But it is true that his intellectual influence is less today than it has been in the past. That this is unfortunate stems, not from the need to read what Pike wrote, but to learn what he taught.

It is certain that the Scottish Rite possesses the talent to preserve those lessons of the past and once again contribute to the intellectual leadership of the craft, always keeping in mind the example of Brother Pike. Quoting from Pope's Essay on Man, we may say of him that he was:

Slave of no sect, who takes no private road,
But looks through Nature up to Nature's God;
Pursues that chain which links the immense design,
Joins heaven and earth, and mortal and divine;
Sees, that no being any bliss can know,
But touches some above, and some below;
Learns from this union of the rising whole,
The first, last purpose of the human soul;

And knows where faith, law, morals, all began,

All end, in Love of God, and Love of Man.

Pike was a great man because he lived greatly. Although few will ever attain such stature in history and probably none of us will ever decide to begin learning Sanskrit at the age of sixty-five, Albert Pike is a worthy model. For us, he is a reminder that perseverance in the face of adversity and hope in the future are the most excellent qualities we can possess.