

BROTHERHOOD

"My Brother, for by that sacred appellation I now address you."

This salutation is sometimes used in the ritual of the first degree when the initiate is greeted for the first time as Brother. It is not found in every version of Masonic ritual. Regrettably, it has disappeared from some which formerly contained it. Perhaps it has become a victim of the desire of modernists who want to "shorten the work" or to make it "more relevant to our times".

In most versions of the ritual the candidate is addressed as "Mister Blank," or "My friend," until that moment when he may be properly saluted as "My Brother". Then the Worshipful Master merely changes the mode of address from "Mister" or "Friend" to "Brother," without any special emphasis or observation.

If the language of Masonic ritual is one of the most important elements which help initiates to become impressed with the meaning and philosophy of the Fraternity, that salutation needs to be made significant and impressive. That sacred appellation is a key for revealing the fundamental spiritual quality of the institution. Merely to slip in the words, "My Brother," as a variation in a form of address, is to risk the initiate's failure to discern the mystic quality of Masonic brotherhood.

Archaic as the word appellation may sound to the ear of a twentieth century initiate, it does suggest to his surprised mind that Freemasonry is a society of cultivated men, that it is rooted in intellectual aspirations, and that he is being addressed as a man who will strive for mental attainments.

The word sacred is even more stimulating to the attentive initiate because of its connotations. Not only does he realize that he is now accepted as a member of the Fraternity, that he is now a Brother among Brethren; but also, even if only vaguely, he becomes aware that this new relationship of brotherhood is to be something special, something spiritual, something related to the ideas he has acquired from sacred writings, something scriptural perhaps, something related to the purposes of the Great Creator.

We Masons like to describe the special quality of our fraternalism as the Mystic Tie, a phrase which acknowledges the spiritual quality of our associating and working together. Mystic, of course, is derived from a Greek word which designated "an initiate into the ancient mysteries," and further suggests a sense of awe or wonder in contemplating or communing with God.

Any expression in the ritual which helps the initiate to relate his Masonic experience to such a spiritual understanding is worth preserving, be it ancient or modern, archaic or new, "My Brother, for by that sacred appellation I now address you."

To qualify the title of Brother as sacred, the first time it is used to salute a new member, is to prepare him to understand "the great secret" of Freemasonry, a secret which is no real secret at all, for it has been told again and again by the lives of dedicated Craftsmen. It is a secret and a mystery only to those who have never been made Masons, for it is the meaning of brotherhood as experienced only by Masons, and even by them, only imperfectly.

Dr. Joseph Fort Newton once wrote, "The secret of Masonry, like the secret of life, can be known only by those who seek it, serve it, live it. It cannot be uttered; it can only be felt and acted. It is, in fact, an open secret, and each man knows it according to his quest and capacity. Like all things most worth knowing, no one can know it for another and no one can know it alone. It is known only in fellowship, by the touch of life upon life, spirit upon spirit, knee to knee, breast to breast, hand in hand."

Such is the thinking-feeling which is stirred in every receptive Mason when he hears the words, "My Brother," as a sacred appellation. Such are the elements of reverence which should characterize his understanding of the Mystic Tie.

He is not merely an associate or ally; he is not merely a well-wisher or a sympathizer; he is not merely a comrade or supporter; he is not merely a confidant or friend.

A Mason is a Brother, in the oldest, finest and truest sense of that word. He is a brother human being, for the sake of humanity. No dogma binds the brotherhood together; no narrow political or social goal, no intolerance of class or nationality provides the brotherhood with a common platform.

Masons are Brothers, in the universal meaning of the word, men who are united by complete freedom of conscience under the banner of pure tolerance, of an affectionate regard and respect for every other human being. A Mason is a man without prejudice. (So mote it be.)

He is a Brother when he estimates the worth of a fellow human being, not by his profession or vocation, not by his special interests as a fellow citizen, not by his sectarian religious beliefs, not by the color of his skin, and not by his age, or nationality, or economic status.

A Mason is a Brother because, of his own free will and accord, he has chosen to seek the light of truth which will set humanity free, because he has been accepted by the Brotherhood to work for the welfare of the whole human family, and because he earnestly desires the Brotherhood of Man, of all men, under the Fatherhood of God.

If that Masonic hope and ideal were the real secret of Freemasonry, it is obviously no secret at all. It is an ideal shared by many men in many places, in many religious and benevolent associations. The secrecy associated with Masonry's mission and purpose lies not in its universal hopes and aspirations; it lies in its methods of instruction, in its ritual and ceremonies, in its fraternal activities and labors.

That secrecy is really symbolic, for its purpose is not to exclude the "profane", but to benefit the individual initiate, by making his initiatory experiences, in which he must actively participate,

sacred, i.e., a mystic consecration. It is the nature of man to seek that which is hidden and, like Prometheus, to acquire "the knowledge of the gods".

The real secret of Masonry, therefore, is an experience which only the members of the Fraternity have voluntarily undergone. The Mystic Tie is their expression for this experience of Masonic brotherhood. They have lived the Mystic Tie when they have visited another lodge in an unfamiliar city, where no one knew them even by name. But having established their claim to genuine Masonic brotherhood, they found themselves accepted and drawn affectionately into the mystic circle of the members of the lodge. No demand for rank, or money, or social status was made. Only the ancient phrases and forms to prove the Brother's Masonic experience were required.

And once he had demonstrated his knowledge of the common Masonic experience, whether it were in Europe, or Asia, or the North American continent, he found himself welcomed with joy into a group of men who were concerned only with the work of making brotherhood real; and the special joy of that common aspiration brightened every activity of the lodge, whether at labor or around the festive board.

Only a Mason can understand the more solemn expression of brotherhood which may come to him as he visits at the bedside of a dying Brother, who in his feeble speechless condition, responds to his sympathetic ministrations with a certain pressure on the hand, as if he were trying to say, "Thank you, my Brother; with that sacred appellation I'm about to say farewell."

Unfortunately, there are Brethren to whom the mystic Masonic experience is a dimly remembered verbal exercise only. The words of the Masonic ritual were impressive, and they acknowledge the noble and lofty ideas which they inspired. But to ponder them as challenges to the self, as testing tools to measure their own Masonic effort "to improve myself in Masonry," this is disquieting enough to "turn them off," and to regard themselves merely as members of a comfortable club or social organization.

They have heard the Masonic instruction: "By the exercise of brotherly love, we are taught to regard the whole human species as one family - the high and the low, the rich and the poor, who, as created by one Almighty Parent, and inhabitants of the same planet, are to aid, support, and protect one another. On this principle, Masonry unites men of every country, sect, and opinion, and conciliates true friendship among those who might otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance."

My Brother, for by that sacred appellation I now address you, in what ways do you exercise brotherly love? Do you really regard the whole human species as one family, in which every man is just as much of a brother as you are? What do you actually do to unite men of every country, sect, and opinion? How can a Mason help to aid, support, and protect our human brothers of that generation with which communication seems so difficult? How do you conciliate true friendship, even in the narrow arena of your own lodge?

On your working answers to such questions, my Brother, depends not only the strengthening of the Mystic Tie, but in a world of tumultuous changes and disturbance, the future influence and usefulness of our gentle Craft.