

FAITH, PROGRESS AND REWARD

The three basic symbols of the Fellowcraft Lecture are the Brazen Pillars, the Winding Stairs and the Middle Chamber. The Brazen Pillars suggest to my mind the idea of Faith. Every Mason has a right to interpret a Masonic symbol for himself, and to read into or out of it the significance that has the most importance to his own life.

Josephus, the Hebrew historian, says: "Moreover, this Hiram made two hollow pillars, whose outsides were of brass." He then gives a detailed description of their dimensions, including their chapters. He states that there was cast with each their chapters lily work, that stood upon the pillar, round about which there was a network interwoven with small palms made of brass; to this also, were hung two hundred pomegranates in two rows. One of these pillars he set at the entrance of the porch, on the right hand, and the other at the left hand. and gave them names.

It is a poor symbol that has but one meaning; these have been subjected to many different readings.

It has been asserted that the Ancients believing that the earth was flat, and being unacquainted with the law of gravity, supposed it to be supported by two Pillars of God, placed at the Western entrance of the then-known world. These became known as the Pillars of Hercules, and are now called Gibraltar, on one side of the straight, and Ceuta on the other. This may account for the origin of the twin pillars.

However this may be, the practice of erecting columns at the entrance of an edifice dedicated to the worship prevailed in Egypt and Phoenicia, and at the erection of King Solomon's Temple the Brazen Pillars were placed in the porch thereof.

Some writers have suggested that they represent the masculine and feminine elements in nature. The contention has been made that they stand for the authority of Church and State, because on stated occasions the High Priest stood before one pillar and the King before the other. The opinion has been held that they have an allusion to the two legendary pillars of Enoch, upon which, tradition informs us, all the wisdom of the ancient world was inscribed in order to preserve it from inundations and conflagrations. William Preston supposed that, by them, Solomon had reference to the pillars of cloud and fire which guided the Children of Israel out of bondage and up to the Promised Land. Doctor Hutchinson says a literal translation of their names is: "In Thee is Strength," and, "It Shall be Established," and by natural transposition may be thus expressed: "Oh, Lord, Thou Art Almighty and Thy Power is Established From Everlasting to Everlasting." I cannot escape the conviction that in meaning they are related to religion, and represent the strength and stability, the perpetuity and providence of God; and in Freemasonry are the symbols of a living faith.

Like every subject of universal extent, faith cannot be defined. The factors and faculties of mightiest import cannot be caught up in speech. Life is the primary fact of which we are

conscious, and yet there is no language by which it can be fenced in. No chart can be made of a mother's love, because it is deeper than words, and reads in little, common things, a wealth that is more than golden. Paul, one of the deepest thinkers of the ages, called faith "The Substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." But all attempts at definition have been in vain.

While we cannot define, we can recognize the powers of faith. It generates energy. It is the dynamics of elevated characters and noble spirits, the source of all that bears the impress of greatness in the world.

While we cannot define, we can realize its necessity.

Without faith it would be impossible to transact business. "It spans the earth with railroads, and cleaves the sea with ships. It gives man wings to fly the air, and fins to swim the deep. It creates the harmony of music and the whirl of factory wheels. It draws man up toward the angels and brings heaven down to earth." By it all human relationship is conditioned. We must have faith in institutions and ideals; faith in friendship, family and fireside; faith in self, faith in man and faith in God.

Freemasonry is the oldest, the largest and the most widely distributed secret society on the face of the earth today by reason of its faith in God.

The Winding Stairway is a symbol of Progress. From a few words contained in the sixth chapter of the First Book of Kings, a fascinating allegory has been fabricated. In his book on the "Symbolism of Freemasonry," Dr. Albert G. Mackey says: "Although the Legend of the Winding Stairs forms an important tradition of ancient Craft Masonry, it is only as a symbol that we can regard this old tradition." M.W. Oliver Day's book on "Symbolism of the Three Degrees" contains a statement to the effect that in the Winding Stairs, an architectural feature of Solomon's Temple, is seized upon to symbolize the journey of life. This symbol teaches that a man's life should never be downward, nor on a dead level; but, no matter how hard or difficult, should always be progressive and ascending. It means, as Dr. Frank Crane says, that "The man who fails is not the man who has no gifts, no chance, but the man who quits or the man who never tries." It is a clarion call to face forward and pull the belt tighter. It means that a Mason can at least try. Edgar A. Guest said:

I'd rather be a failure than the man who's never tried; I'd rather seek the mountain-top than always stand aside. Oh, let me hold some lofty dream and make my desperate fight, And though I fail I still shall know I tried to serve the right.

The longing to climb onward and upward, symbolized by the Winding Stairs, caused Robert Lewis Stevenson, frail and sickly in body but mighty of soul, to write these words:

"To thrill with joy of girded men, to go on forever and fail and go on again, with the half of a broken hope for a pillow at night, to know that somehow the right is the right."

It stands for that spirit of progress which, like a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, has led the race across the wilderness of life, out of the dark night of ignorance and superstition, up to the day-dawn of civilization, of knowledge and science, of intellectual and spiritual power.

Just as the Brazen Pillars are symbols of faith, the Stairway winding upward is a symbol of human progress. As such, it stands for all that gives us better clothes, better food, better music, better schools, better churches, better homes, better heads and better hearts; and for the vision, industry and endurance of those through whom the results are achieved. Robert G. Ingersoll said:

"The progress of the world depends upon the men who walk in the fresh furrows and through the rustling corn, upon those who sow and reap, upon those whose faces are radiant with the glare of furnace fires, upon delvers in the mines and the workers in the shops, upon those who give to the winter morning the ringing music of the axe, upon those who battle with the boisterous billows and go down to the sea in ships, the brave thinkers, the heroes, the patriots and the martyrs."

This is the meaning of the Winding Stairs. It stands for art and science and song and hope and love and aspirations high. As a symbol of progress it is a prophecy of the future, that tomorrow will be better than today. It speaks not only of the past and present but of a dim and distant day when the "Old Ghosts of Race Prejudice and Religious Bigotry will cover eyeless sockets with fleshless hands and fade forever from the mind of man, when love will rule the race, casting out fear, and brotherhood will heal the old hurt and heartache of humanity."

Masonry has played a conspicuous part in the onward march of civilization, and so long as Masons transmute this Legend of the Winding Stairs into conscience, courage, character and conduct; it will continue its contribution to the progress of the world. The Middle Chamber is a symbol of Reward. In Speculative Freemasonry it stands for that place in life where a man receives his wages, the reward of his own endeavors.

Let us not misconceive this word "Reward." Some of the wealthiest men on earth today are minus bank accounts. Carlyle said: "The wealth of a man consists in the number of things he loves and blesses and in the number of things he is loved and blessed by."

The word reward is like a two-edged sword, it cuts both ways; it means to give in return, whether good or evil. The shortest Book in the Old Testament is the Vision of Obadiah. It consists of one chapter, at the center of which is this text: "As Thou hast done unto Thy brother it shall be done unto Thee, Thy reward shall return upon Thine own head."

The law of compensation is manifest in every department of nature. The Middle Chamber is the Masonic expression of that principle. "As Thou hast done, it shall be done unto Thee." is like saying that lives have echoes. Out there is a great mountain of humanity; consciously or unconsciously, silent influences issue from each life and, striking against the peaks and summit tops of that mountain, reverberate and echo back upon the life from whence they came. If they go out good and true they echo back in blessings and benedictions; if they go out mean and low they echo back in curses and consternation.

Benedict Arnold is the saddest figure in American history. Just as Judas Iscariot sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver, Benedict Arnold sold his honor and his manhood for thirty thousand dollars in English gold and became a traitor to his homeland and the cause of freedom. The influences that came out of his life were those of treason and treachery; and by the operation of this principle, symbolized by the Middle Chamber, the echo that came back was the contempt of mankind. For all the generations of time the name of Benedict Arnold is inseparably linked to that of Judas Iscariot; together they will go down the ages a byword and a hissing. Some years ago I read a volume by Dr. Hillis, entitled:

"Great Books as Life Teachers," and in it discovered how this principle operated in the life of one of the greatest men of the last century.

Lord Shaftsbury was the seventh in the line of Earls. At the age of twenty-five he took his place in the Parliament of England. For more than forty years, when Parliament rose at midnight in the winter, and the other Lords went to their palatial homes or clubs, Shaftsbury would take a lantern and go through snow and sleet to London Bridge, Waterloo Bridge and the other spots in which unfortunates hid themselves and huddled together to keep warm. By the light of his lantern, he led shivering men and boys to shelter houses, where each received a bowl of soup, a loaf of bread and a thick blanket. For the half-clothed street Arabs he started fifty schools, in which crowded the thousand ragged boys. He established night schools, industrial schools and homes.

I cannot call the roll of his manifold labors, but after years of service had accumulated upon his head he gave this testimony: "During a long life I have proved that not one kind word ever spoken, not one kind deed ever done, but sooner or later returns to bless the giver and becomes a chain, binding men with golden hands to the throne of God." Members of the English Royalty and Nobility, many financiers, merchant princes, scholars and statesmen of the British Empire, assembled at his funeral in Westminster Abbey. The Orator of the occasion began his address with this remark: "This man goeth down to the grave amid the benedictions of the poor and the admiring love of the rich."

The influences that came from his life were those of love and unselfish service. By the operation of the principle symbolized by the Middle Chamber in Freemasonry, the echo that came back was a myriad-voiced chorus of love and honor to his memory, and the name of Shaftsbury became one with which to conjure and inspire men forward to noble deeds.

In his "Essay on the Law of Compensation," Emerson asked this question: "Has a man gained anything who has received one hundred favors and rendered none?" The answer is easy; such a man has become a moral bankrupt, the smile has left his face, the song has deserted his heart, to him life has become a selfish and sordid thing.

Emerson says this principle means that "Crime and Punishment grow out of one stem, that curses recoil upon the head of him who imprecates them, that a man cannot do wrong without suffering wrong, that in the last analysis the thief steals from himself and the borrower runs into his own debt," that "The Chief end of nature is benefit, but for every benefit received a tax is levied, the benefit must be rendered again, line for line, deed for deed, cent for cent to somebody," that by the operation of this law "The Martyr can never be dishonored, every lash inflicted is a tongue of

fame, every prison house a more illustrious abode, every burned book enlightens the world, every suppressed word reverberates through the earth from side to side; it is the whipper who is whipped and the tyrant who is undone."

The Middle Chamber, as a symbol of reward, means that a man will get out of his Lodge, out of his home, out of his life exactly what he puts into it. It also means that whenever a man pursues a noble quest, whenever he is held in the viselike grip of devotion to a great ideal, the end is sure and the reward beyond all doubt.

Much of the philosophy of the Fellowcraft Degree is contained in these three words; Faith, Progress and Reward. The Pillars stand for faith, the Winding Stairs for progress and the Middle Chamber for reward. There has never been any progress without faith and there is no good reward without progress.