

MASONRY IN THE GREAT LIGHT

The Short Talk Bulletin of December, 1931, on "The Three Scripture Readings," described the symbolic significance of the passages from scripture used in conferring the three degrees.

Masonry in the Bible is not confined to these three poems in prose. Masons are taught to look to the Great Knight for spiritual comfort, as the inestimable gift of God to man for the rule and guide of his faith and practice. If he searches intelligently, he will there find much Masonic teaching, an amplification of ritual, a continuation of symbolism as beautiful as it is intangible, as lovely as it is ethereal.

At the door of every Lodge stands the Tiler with a drawn sword in his hand. How apt to this office is this verse:

“So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden, Cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life. (Genesis 3:24)

A man not a Mason is not permitted in the Lodge; the Tiler’s sword “turns every way” to keep the path to the tree of spiritual life to be found in every Lodge.

In the opening of the Lodge is mention of the widowed and the fatherless, that we may never forget a Mason’s duty to those whose natural protector is no more.

“A father of the fatherless and a judge if the widows, is God in his holy habitation. (Psalms 68:5) Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. (Isaiah 1:17)”

In these two passages are the charity teachings which Masons follow; the very heart of that care of the lonely and the orphan which is at once a Master Mason’s duty and his pride. He who visits his Jurisdiction’s Masonic Home, and there sees the helpless helped, or is happy to contribute to the support of the Charity Foundation, Grand Lodge Charity Fund or Lodge gift, can be comforted that he follows the inspired teaching of these words from the Great Light.

In many Grand Lodges there is much discussion as to the “Doctrine of the Perfect Youth” which proclaims that a man must be unmaimed to be accepted as a candidate. Modern ideas in some Grand Lodges lean toward relaxing the severe restrictions; others still cling to the old idea that he who has lost a member - even a finger - must suffer for the good of the whole Order, that the Ancient Landmark be preserved. Some quotations from the Old Testament seem to show that the priests of Israel regarded physical perfection much as the Fraternity has done:

Only he shall not go in unto the veil, nor come nigh unto the altar, because he hath a blemish; that he profane not my sanctuaries; for I the Lord so sanctify them. (Leviticus 21:23) Ye shall offer at your own will a male without blemish, of beeves, or the sheep, or of the goats. But

whatsoever hath a blemish, that shall ye not offer; for it shall not be acceptable for you.
(Leviticus 22:19-20)

On the other side of the question, and bearing vitally on the principle that Masonry is universal, and no respecter of race or creed, is this clear exposition:

“But Peter said, Not so Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. (Acts 10:14-15-34-35)”

Where is a man first prepared to be made a Mason? Think of the essential symbolism and then read:

“For the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. (Samuel 16:7)”

The Great Light shadowed forth the truths of our symbolism and the teachings of the three degrees long before Operative Freemasonry, as we know it, came upon the earth to extend and promote the dissemination of those great principles on which all true character making is based.

After a candidate enters the Lodge by the West gate, the first question asked him sets the key to all that the degree may be to him; he who answers this solemn inquiry must be sodden minded indeed if he visualizes not the serious import and the glorious future of the ceremony thus anticipated. Long, long ago sweet singers sang:

“In God have I put my trust; I will not be afraid what man can do unto me, (Psalms 56:11) Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths (Proverbs 3:5-6) Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the Lord forever; for the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength. (Isaiah 26:3-4)”

Masons know the benefit of Lodge prayer. Never the Lodge is opened but a petition to the Most High is a part of the ceremony; never a degree is conferred but humble petition to Deity forms an important part. The Bible is filled with exhortations regarding prayer, which show the essentials of asking what we may receive. Familiar though we are with these beautiful passages, recall this one here:

“And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive. (Matthew 21:22)”

Nothing equivocal, nothing hidden or obtuse about that promise; a clear cut statement from the lowly Son of Man who walked by Galilee; a truth acceptable alike to Jew and Gentile, Mohammedan, and Parsee, Buddhist and Christian, profane and Mason.

By slow degrees, in a solemnity which no man who has experienced it can ever forget. the initiate approaches the Holy of Holies - the Sacred Altar of Freemasonry - there to assume obligations of such importance that no man who takes them upon his heart and conscience is ever quite the same thereafter. The old testament is filled with stories of the altar, of places of worship built of rude stones in the open, of silver and gold in Temples, of high hopes and devout hearts in tents in the wilderness. Most tender and touching, as well as most symbolic from the Masonic viewpoint, are these verses:

“And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land; and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him. (genesis 12:7) And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one the mountains which I will tell of. (Genesis 22:2) And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the Altar upon the wood. (Genesis 22:9)”

If a man have not a humble and contrite heart before the Altar of Freemasonry it were better for him not to kneel. For the Altar is a symbol of sacrifice. Abraham was required to give his very heart; true, it was but a test, but he knew it not. How many times may the Freemason be required to sacrifice before the Altar of Freemasonry as a test only - and know it not? Here must he offer up selfishness, and learn to live for others; here he must enter into a solemn pact with his brethren that they are, to him, more important than he can be to himself; here he must lay pride and egotism and selfish independence, and bow not only his head but his very soul before the Great Architect of the Universe. Brethren cannot know if the sacrifice is real or but lip service, but he is a brave initiate indeed who does not believe that One knows in what spirit and with what self-abnegation he lays his sacrifice upon our Altar; even as Abraham of old.

We are told to read the book of Ruth; many if not most rituals follow almost exactly these words:

“Now this was the manner in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbor; and this was a testimony in Israel. (Ruth 4:7)”

“Redeeming and Changing” refer to property in general and land in particular; he who had given his land as security for a debt, redeemed it just as we can pay off a mortgage on our house.

“Changing” is an old word for selling; he who sold his land “changed” it to another owner. We sign a paper, and perhaps acknowledge it before a Notary Public, by swearing to it. Our ancient Jewish brother plucked off his shoe as a testimony that he sold that which he had a right to sell. It is not improbable that the custom arose from the inability of a shoeless man to run away; it is analogous to removing the glove before we offer our hand, as Knights of Old stripped off their mailed gauntlet before shaking hands, in testimony that they feared no enemy.

It would be easily possible to extend this Bulletin for many pages, and still remain in the Entered Apprentice Degree; the obligation, the bringing of light, the poor, the house not made with

hands, the northeast corner, the lambskin - practically all the symbols of our initiatory ceremony can be amplified and made clearer by an intelligent reading of the Holy words. But space forbids.

The Fellowcraft Degree is often less appreciated than its inner meaning deserves. It is no mere stepping stone to the Master's Degree, not a ceremony designed only to stretch out the process of initiation and make the neophyte wait a bit longer before he receives full Masonic Light. It holds a series of teachings of such importance that no brother may truthfully declare himself a good Mason who has not taken at least its essentials into his heart.

We are taught of the "glorious works of creation" as indicating the "perfections of our divine creator." What is glory? Here is not meant fame, applause, the exalted opinion held of a man by his fellows; but the glory which is the sunset, the glory which is great music, the glory which is inspiring poetry. The "glorious" works of creation are those which inspire man with reverence and awe, those which the Great Light typifies in:

"When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained: What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? (Psalms 8:3-4)"

Freemasons are taught to reverence the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Save to attend divine services, or to lay away a departed brother, no Lodge may meet or work on the Sabbath, for Freemasonry, not a religion, is an upholder and supporter of all religions.

"Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made. (Genesis 2: 1-2-3) I am the Lord your God; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and hallow my sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I and the Lord your God. (Ezekiel 20:19-20)"

How many craftsmen built the Temple? Curiously enough; many rituals do not strictly follow the plain statement in the Old Testament, which reads:

"And he set three score and ten thousand of them to be bearers of burdens, and four score thousand to be hewers in the mountain, and three thousand and six hundred overseers to set the people awork. (2 Chronicles 2:18)

The wages for these laborers and overseers, as all who ever heard a Middle Chamber Lecture know, were paid in corn, wine and oil - the currency with which those of olden times bought and sold.

"And behold, I will give to thy servants, the hewers that cut timber, twenty thousand measures of beaten wheat, and twenty thousand measures of barley, and twenty thousand baths of wine, and twenty thousand baths of oil. (2 Chronicles 2:10)"

The word “corn” is not mentioned, but our “corn” is a generic term for all the grains of the Israelites, and has no reference to maize.

The Wages of a Fellowcraft of these modern days are paid in symbolic corn, wine and oil; the refreshment of mind and soul which comes from brotherhood practiced, duty well done, lessons humbly learned; wages, indeed, far more valuable than their ancient prototypes of fruit of the land and the vineyard waiting only for the worthy Fellowcraft to stretch forth his hand to take.

It is hardly necessary here to draw attention to those passages of Scripture which are the foundation for that part of the Middle Chamber Lecture which deals with the pillars in the Porch, the passage of the Jordan and the war between the Ephraimites and the Gileadites; much of our ritual follows the words of the Old Testament (Judges) almost exactly. The fellowcraft follows his brethren of olden time who “went up the with winding stairs to the middle chamber, and out of the middle into the third.” (I Kings 6:8)

In our Middle Chamber we find a Holy of Holies indeed, for here is displayed that Letter “G” which is the very essence of Freemasonry. Never the Lodge or Grand Lodge which has not some such symbol; in all lands and climes and Jurisdictions is some sign of the Most High in the East.

“G” is not in the Bible as a symbol, but other letters are:

“I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty. (Rev. 1:8).

And God said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. (exodus 3:14)”

Here the cryptic phrase “I AM THAT I AM” is a symbol, just as our Letter “G” is a symbol; the inspired prophet who wrote the Old Testament knew the value of the symbol, even as we know it. So when for the first time the Fellowcraft hears of the significance of the Letter “G” in the East, he is kin to those ancient teachers and spiritual rulers who wrote of God with symbols, even as we so typify Him.

Omitting many another Scripture reference to the teachings of this beautiful degree we pass on to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason. Some Lodges of some Jurisdictions exemplify an especially beautiful lesson from the contention and confusion which existed among the workmen of the Temple at the time of the tragedy. In these Lodges the Master instructs the brethren, if any have any cause of difference with their fellows, to leave the Lodge room, nor return until that quarrel is reconciled. Authority for this is found in several places in the Great Light - whether or not it be the practice in most of our American Grand Jurisdictions matters not; to be at odds with a brother of the lodge is not to live the true Masonic spirit.

Ponder these instructions:

“Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy

brother, and then come and offer thy gift. (Matthew 5:23-24) Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between he and thee alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. (Matthew 18:15) And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him (Luke 17:4)”

In the Master’s Degree a brother must pray for himself.

Happy is he who has the prayers of his fellows, standing as one among a united group, all for one and one for all. But in the life of every man comes the time when the prayers of others avail not; when he stands spiritually naked and alone before the Great White Throne, there to offer up his petition with none to say “In too, speak for him.” So is the brother about to be raised taught to pray, alone with his God. It is good here to recall the words which promise that such prayers are heard:

“In my distress I call upon the Lord, and cried to my God; and he did hear my voice out of his Temple, and my cry did enter into his ears. (Samuel 22:7) In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee; for thou wilt answer me. (Psalms 86:7)”

All Master Masons find a peculiar significance in the expression “the clefts of the rock.” How many know the symbolic, as well as the historic meaning of the phrase? In our ceremony it is place of hiding which availed not against those who had the right and righteousness on their side. In symbolism it is an emblem of the uselessness of pride and self-sufficiency; no clefts of the rock - nay, not caves nor valleys nor mountain tops not any hiding place upon earth - exist where sin may hide either from itself or from the All Seeing Eye.

“The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground? Though then exalt thyself as the eagle and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord. (Obediah 1:3-4) Fifty pages would not supply space for all the beautiful allusion to Masonic truth and Light which a careful perusal of the Great Light discovers. But enough, perhaps, has been quoted to show that Freemasonry is in the Bible in full measure, pressed down and running over. We who have so much from the Scriptures to be a part of our ceremonies, have left far more than we appropriated.

Two final quotations; even as the raising and the Substitute Word form the very crux and climax of the Sublime degree; so are these the head of the corner of all the many Scriptural expositions of symbolism to be found in the Rule and Guide of Our Faith. “So shall ,y word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. (Isaiah 55:11)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)”

“SO MOTE IT BE!”