

The True Esotery of Masonry

Author: The American Freemason (July 1912)

[Freemasonry teaches us great and valuable truths and the same are veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols. At the time of initiation, entry into the temple is sought for on behalf of the initiate, as a poor candidate, in a state of darkness...humbly soliciting to be admitted to the mysteries and privileges of freemasonry. The mysteries of Freemasonry are not either fully or in part explained in the rituals. Some scholars are of the opinion that Esotericism constitutes the mysteries of freemasonry. Time and again there had been introspection as to whether Freemasonry all over the world is unfolding its mysteries to its members and whether any effective steps are being taken to enlighten the brethren on that aspect or whether the brotherhood is moving away from that responsibility or whether that aspect is being progressively ignored. In humble response to the requests of very many of our users, we have arranged to post some articles on the Esotericism of freemasonry. We commence with an introspection made and published in **The American Freemason in July 1912**. Please read on]

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"Where shall I find the mysteries of Masonry?" So writes a troubled brother and his question gives voice to a query unexpressed in many minds. He thus continues: "In outward form of the fraternity there is much to interest the merely curious. But I am not particularly interested in textual criticism of 'Old Charges,' nor concerned with the exact line of descent through which forms and ceremonies may have come to us. Yet if, as we are told on all hands, Masonry has a soul, a something worth while, how shall it be apprehended?"

The question is put sincerely and with the clearness that its importance and urgency demand. We, but repeat, what has been said many times before and substantially in the same words, that if Masonry offers no more than its catechisms and lectures and its outward ceremonies, it is not worth the attention of any thinking man. It will be granted, further, that those who hint often and darkly at a secret content and esotery of Masonry are the very men, who have no clear nor adequate conception of the institution. They are either to be classed with confidence men or dupes, or intoxicated with the fumes of their own words, or hypnotized by mummeries they can not understand. Hearing one of these hold forth, we are reminded of the fellow, who has been egregiously fooled in a fake side-show, yet afterwards is loudest in urging others to enter, so that he may not stand alone in his shame. The average man, fairly capable of judging an organization from the information vouchsafed or the facts apparent, finds nothing in his initiation to the several degrees deserving of more than a passing interest. Nor will continued attendance at Lodge - as Lodges are generally conducted - do much to enlighten him as to the real meaning of the Craft. He is glibly informed, most likely by brothers to whom the words they themselves utter convey little or no meaning, that "Freemasonry consists of a course of moral and philosophical instructions, illustrated by hieroglyphics and taught, according to ancient usage, by types, emblems and allegorical

figures." That is a pretty large prospectus and were its promises fulfilled in our Lodges, Masonic instruction would be a very valuable addition to the education of any man. But it is worse than a shame to speak of "moral and philosophical instruction" in the face of what we know to be the curricula of the Lodges. It is conceivable that one who has no more than a vague idea of what is meant in this phrase might be impressed by the jumble of words he hears confusedly. But no good thing of knowledge can come of such impression. He is further told, from time to time, of mysteries to be imparted, and at the end must wonder where the secret had been missed. And at this point, when he has learned to do no more than twiddle his thumbs, his Masonic education is assumed to be complete and he is thereafter left to his own devices. If he learns the ritual, and thus follows along the line of least resistance, for one having any ambition, he is regarded as a very valuable addition to his Lodge. If he lacks such ambition, the social side of the fraternity offers itself, and the "good fellow" soon learns to regard this as most important function of the organization. Reiteration of the ritual quickly palls on such a one, but the banquet-hall and the smoking room will long hold their attractions. If again and the case is unfortunately infrequent - one has a glimpse, even through bungled ceremonies and recitation of trite sentences, of an esoteric Masonry and seeks to peer beyond the veil of verbiage, he is regarded with mingled pity and contempt by his easy-going fellows. The Lodge will not and can not afford him any help in his search for that which is lost, because those who should give instruction are every whit as ignorant as those they are supposed to teach. Should such a brother be proof against discouragements and disappointments. Should he persist in desiring and seeking knowledge, he is finally, and at the best, regarded as a bore. By some, who are satisfied with things as they are, the investigator, as he gains to some truth, is likely to be shunned as a disturber, setting an example of inquiry, that might entail much unnecessary trouble.

Before me as I write are a number of volumes of Grand Lodge Proceedings, recently received. At every one of the annual communications which these record a Grand Orator was heard, and his rounded phrasings are spread large upon the pages. Yet I have searched through all these, as through such speeches I have searched for years, in the vain hope to find a brother who can reach on such occasion to the full measure of his opportunity. For it is needed that one arise, with eloquent tongue and convincing speech, who shall be able to discern the potentialities of Masonry, and also see how far it falls short of reaching and enforcing its own ideals. It is required that the words of such an orator shall be so heated in the fires of sincerity, that they will burn through the outward shell of indifference and sink deep and permanently into the consciousness of the Craft.

In place of such theme and such treatment, what is given ? Long and rambling discourses on civilizations dead and gone; rehashed essays on gods that have no worshipers and of temples that have been forsaken and in utter ruin this thousand years past and more. And these things are strung together in loose fashion on a tenuous and brittle thread, named for the occasion the "Masonry of the ages." Or, perhaps, there is flight over the field of modern history, with painful searching for the names of men of any note, who have been members of the fraternity. And because these show fairly numerous the absurd inference is drawn that Masonry is somehow to be credited with whatever they may have accomplished.

"If not so frequent would not this be strange,
That 'tis so frequent, this is stranger still."

Let us face the disagreeable, even humiliating truth. Let us admit in all candor and honesty that for the most part our Masonry, when it professes a moral and philosophical teaching, is a huge sham. It is, as at present directed, without adequate motive, and in no way reaches to its capabilities and real purposes. These, then, are the alternatives. Either to claim nothing for the organization than that it is a great social organization and as such is fulfilling its purpose or to bow our heads in shame, with knowledge, that the soul of Masonry has been stifled and smothered and denied manifestation, while the body is garbed in tawdry robes and hung thick with garish ornaments.

What, again, are the facts, In the two hundred years of Masonry of the English-speaking countries, of the really historical period, has it made any visible impress upon the world of thought and action? This is not a question for flamboyant orators to answer, but rather for serious-minded students of events to consider. And I say to you that if this great brotherhood of ours had not been of set purpose and intent turned from its first direction, it would today rank first and be acknowledged first, among the forces that are making for the advancement of humanity. For it was meant at one time, that Masonry should give full scope and protection to those who urge freedom of thought. It was intended that Masonry should set example to all the peoples of a wise tolerance, distinguishing between the conservatism that only hampers and retards, and the radicalism that would destroy. It was given to Masonry the task of breaking down the barriers, that the ages had raised of caste and class and race and nationality; of finding and heralding manhood as the supreme product of Time. Instead, at least in our boasted English and American variety of the Craft, we have given over control to sectarianism and smug respectability, to the politician and the ignoramus. And if one stands against the mob, proclaiming righteousness, the voices are loud of those who cry, "Crucify him!" It is so nice to go with the current, so long, at least, as the current runs smoothly; to disagree with no one, to antagonize no one, and to evaporate at last, like a bubble, without meaning or purpose to existence. So runs the Masonry of our generation. But it should be remembered that in the great current of human existence there are iron pots afloat, as well as those of clay, and sooner or later these will come in contact, with results disastrous for the vessels of brittle substance. So I say to you that time will come and is even now near at hand, when there will be stress and test for our orators and perfervid writers and our Grand Lodge politicians, and they will shrink from the contact with certain iron pots that may threaten cracking and sinking. Fair weather Masons are plentiful, but any season of peril or of obloquy will sift them, as troublous times before have sifted, to a numerical loss but a strengthening of the Craft.

The idea and ideal is of a world-wide Craft; a brotherhood great and ever-growing; an active force striving for enlarged freedom, for justice and true righteousness; a factor real and important in the dynamics of civilization. Would not such an institution give theme and inspiration for art and literature? But what can genius take of value from an organization given over to mediocre rule and sordid aims; what can the true poet find in mechanical ceremonies and emasculated moralities; what thing of lasting beauty can be brought from contemplation of the commonplace? To the hurt of Masonry - the ideal Masonry - no poet has found his theme therein, providing for the fraternity "that grand chariot wherein king-thoughts ride." I know there have been rhymesters and spoilers of paper, and are to this day, who like Mary of Scotland, have in their lines "offended all the laws of God and man and meter," and these are hailed as Masonic poets. Not yet has there been one of intellect so great

and insight so keen as would suffice to formulate and fix a real philosophy, basing the aspirations and purposes of Masonry on the immutable verities. Nor has one worthy product of the artist's brush or sculptor's chisel redeemed the Craft from sordidness, showing the soul of Masonry through its grosser form. Surely these things would have been, if only the fraternity had gone upon the highest path of attainment - if the true esotery of Freemasonry had been made manifest to true initiates.

As it is the inquirer, asking still for that which is hidden or lost, has no recourse but to search - and search vainly - through succeeding grades. In each of these he is promised that the veil shall be lifted, that the Lost Word shall be revealed, the philosopher's stone resolve for him between truth and error; sight of the Holy Grail reward his quest. And thus seeking he comes at last to the end of paths, that lead no whither, his most earnest efforts unavailing.

But is there not, my brother seeking in very truth for light, a more than vaguely hinted meaning, even in the mutilated and obscured forms of Symbolic Masonry? Is there no trace left of the Wisdom that is of all time, and known in its varying degrees of illumination to initiates of all ages? Is there to be heard in our Lodges no echo of that subtly secret speech which antique alchemists hedged about with barbarous terms of transmutation. For ever the gross, the earthy, must be broken down, that so the essence of being may be freed. Is there no indication of this in the Master's legend? The esotery of Masonry, my brother, can not be taught in any formal lessons, though it should be from the wiser brothers you receive directions toward the East of knowledge. There are, as runs the monitorial lecture, three jewels of a Fellow Craft - the attentive ear, the instructive tongue and the faithful breast. But, alas, how seldom is the second found! Yet for the Master's use two others are to be added - the soul of intuition and the brain stored with knowledge. Without these no esotery can make itself manifest; with them shall all secret places be explored, and treasures brought forth as may be for the use of the seeker.

The Arcanum is not revealed to him profane in spirit, even though he wears the girdle of the initiate.