



The Master Mason

Foreword

It is safe to say that among the countless thousands who have in the past been raised to the sublime Degree of a Master Mason, no one of them realized at the time the full implications of the ceremony. This would be clearly impossible. Yet it is vitally important that the deeper meanings of this degree be understood if one is to become a master Mason in fact as well as in name.

This final booklet is intended to indicate something of what lies beyond the instruction you have already received. If it encourages you to investigate still further, it will indeed have served a good purpose.

“On the Threshold” is the appropriate title of the first booklet presented to you; in a sense, it would be equally fitting for this one also, for while you have been given the third and final degree, while you have by no means **finished** your Masonry; on the contrary, you have only **completed your entrance** into the fraternity. You now stand actually “on the threshold” of a new and potentially important experience, which should mature into a life relationship rich in its values to you, and marked by your own loyalty and usefulness to the craft.

The Master Mason

You are now a Master Mason and, by reason thereof, a member of the oldest and largest fraternity in the world, an institution whose beginnings are lost in the dim reaches of the past. You achieved this distinction by participating in ceremonies which men have practiced in one form or another, but always with the same idea and purpose, since the childhood of the human race.

Your enjoyment of Freemasonry, its value to you in your future life, your contribution to the fulfillment of its great mission, will be in direct proportion to your understanding of its secrets, which, if you have just passed, you do not yet possess and which can only be gained by your own endeavors and the assistance of your brethren. Your own endeavors will depend entirely on your devotion to Freemasonry's great mission, the bringing to mankind of a full comprehension of the brotherhood of all men under the fatherhood of one ever-living God.

Much has been written of Freemasonry.

The Board of Custodians, through its district deputy grand lecturers, is prepared to make you proficient in the ritual, and the Committee on Masonic Education is prepared to help explain Freemasonry even further. You **can** learn secrets of Freemasonry if you **will**. The **will** you must yourself furnish.

The purpose of this booklet is only as an introduction to this great field of Masonic learning. We hope it will furnish you a starting point in your search, and that it will encourage you to search further. Your efforts, if you do so, will be richly rewarded.

Freemasonry has many sides. To the lover of ritual, it is the quintessence of beauty; to the purist, it reveals a field of jurisprudence in its landmarks, traditions, customs, constitutions and laws; to the research student, it opens up avenues of investigation that would require a lifetime to pursue. The philosopher here discovers a simple yet profound solution of the problem of human relationships, while the historian finds the beginnings of democratic thought and the foundations of democratic political

organization. And to every man it presents unlimited opportunities for fine and helpful friendship and encouraging companionship.

Many of the symbols of the Master's degree have already been explained in the preceding degrees; others are self-explanatory, yet others are fully explained in ritual. With these we will not concern ourselves here. But there are others that are not so obvious and are yet tremendously important to an understanding of the secrets of a master Mason. To those we would now direct your attention.

The Circumambulation

The circumambulation in each degree is accompanied by its own scripture reading. That in the Master's Degree is, of all three, the most intriguing. We can explain it no better than to quote Brother Carl Claudy's *Introduction To Freemasonry*.

“Read it how you will, the majestic and the awe-inspiring poetry rings here the solemn warning with a shake of the heart and a shiver up the back ... Remember

how thy Creator ... now, before the fearsome storms of life, or the decay of old age is upon you; wait not until 'fears are in the way' to cry for the help to the Almighty. Delay not until toothless, sightless, white-haired age asks for help from on high because there is no help left on earth! Remember now thy Creator, while limbs are strong and desire ardent, while life pulses redly and the world is all before ...

“No man thinks of his Master Mason’s Degree but hears again in his heart at least the beginning and ending of this sermon in poetry: ‘Remember now thy Creator, in the days of thy youth; ... then shall the dust return to the earth as it was and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.’ The solemn strokes on the bell which is Ecclesiastes and the heart gripping drama of the legend of Hiram Abiff are never to be known apart by him who has met them together.”

The Hiramic Legend

Let us now symbolically pluck our shoes from off our feet because the road we propose to travel traverses holy ground. Here is the essence of philosophy, the answer

to all its seekings and yet its mystery of mysteries. To understand Freemasonry; to miss its significance is to remain forever in outer darkness.

Looking at the story of the master merely as a drama, our good brother, the late Edwin Booth, one of the world's great tragedians, said:

“In all my research and study, in all my close analysis of the masterpieces of Shakespeare, in my earnest determination to make those plays appear real on the mimic stage, I have never, and nowhere, met tragedy so real, so sublime, so magnificent as the legend of Hiram. It is substance without shadow the manifest destiny of life which requires no picture and scarcely a word to make a lasting impression upon all who can understand. To be a master, and to throw my whole soul into work, with the candidate for my audience and the lodge for my stage, would be a greater personal distinction than to receive the plaudits of people in the theaters of the world.”

But we must look further to understand the drama's symbolic significance, and our

search will carry us back to the very beginning of spiritual thought among men.

Remember always that the legend of Hiram is allegorical. There is a Hiram in the Biblical story of the building of Solomon's Temple. He is no doubt the same Hiram. But of the legend of his death as we have it, there is no trace in history, either sacred or profane. To pass through the second section of the third degree with the thought that you are portraying an historical event is to miss the meaning of the degree.

Concerning this, the Grand Lodge of New York, in its booklet explaining the degree, has this to say:

“The first step in understanding the story of Hiram Abiff is to see, and never afterwards to forget, that the whole of the degree is symbolic using that the word in its largest sense. Some new facts borrowed from history are used in it, but not many, and in each case not for the sake of history. Ritual cares for neither time nor place, takes its materials where it finds them, works them over to suit its own purpose; it moves in a timeless,

spaceless religion, make its appeal to the mind through the imagination, and its sole purpose is making effective in the experience of man certain realities of the moral and spiritual life. If therefore no such record is found in the books of Kings and Chronicles as the degree's story of Hiram Abiff, or if it is found that the historical facts given in it are at variance with the records of the sacred writings, or if they appear to contradict them outright, the fact need occasion no uneasiness. The history, such as there is of it, is fluid, freely reshaped for ritualistic purposes, as Shakespeare reshaped the annals of the English kings in his historical dramas, or as Milton worked over with a free hand the materials from the book of Genesis in his *Paradise Lost*."

The idea that lies behind the Hiramic legend is as old as religious thinking among men. The same elements existed in the story of Osiris, which was celebrated by the Egyptians in their ancient temples; the old Persians told it concerning Mithras, their hero god. In Syria, the Dionysian Mysteries had the very same elements in the story of Dionysius; for the Romans, Bacchus was the god who died

and lived again. There is also the story of Tammuz, older than any of these. These are collectively referred to as the ancient mysteries. They were celebrated by secret societies, much like ours, with allegorical ceremonies, during which the initiates were advanced from one degree to another in these old societies. Read these old stories for yourself and marvel how men in all ages have taught the same great truths in the same effective way.

The story was carried down from ancient days by the Roman Callegia; the Essenes, who followed the teachings of the Christ; the Comacine Masters, who were temple builders and, moving from Rome to an island in Lake Como, carried northward the tradition of temple building. They, in turn passed the tradition on to the cathedral builders of the middle ages, and they to the Freemasons who built the great churches and other holy edifices in England and the north countries, whose tradition we have inherited.

Thus Masonry is a great fellowship of men of all countries and all ages who are capable of discovering in the religious teachings of all humanity, some of them

crude indeed, the fundamental truth common to them all, that God is the Father of all mankind, and all men are brethren; that this principle is worth dying for; and that he who remains steadfast in the service of this ideal may well hope for and expect immortal life.

The Word

But the degree of a master Mason has one other great mystery to show us. We speak of it sometimes as “the word,” sometimes as “the secrets of a master mason,” sometimes as “that which was lost,” and again as “the lost word.” To us it is the symbol of the very truth concerning God and man and the relationship of God to man and man to man. We never find it, and yet we constantly seek it, with only the assurance that sometime, somewhere, when our labors here on earth are ended, when our temple is completed, when wisdom, strength, and beauty exist at one and the same time, then we shall know it in all its fullness. Until then, we must be content with a substitute. So Masonry must ever remain an unfinished story.

Is it any wonder, then, that we have

additional Masonic degrees? To every man must come a time when he thinks he has solved the riddle of the universe, and he says to himself, "Here is Truth! Here is the word!" But, also, the finite cannot comprehend the infinite, and all men's dreams of truth must always fall short of the absolute. But in the striving for it, men grow and, as men have put into the form of words and ceremonies their own comprehensions of the truth, they have left us as a rich heritage to aid us in our search. Let us be thankful for this birthright.

Again, as in the story of Hiram, we are not original in our philosophy of the word. The Jewish people had a tradition of a great word of which none but the high priest knew the pronounciation, and he might pronounce it only in the holy of holies of the temple. They represented this word in their writings by the consonants, JHVH. By this unpronounceable name of unknown spelling they tried to express the idea of incomprehensible infinite of deity.

St. John the Evangelist is one of the patron saints of Freemasonry, and rightly

so because he also taught his followers about a word. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Later he speaks of the Word being made flesh and dwelling among men. Perhaps, as you ponder more on Freemasonry, you will be able to read these lines of the great evangelist and comprehend their mysteric meaning.

Brother J. Otis Ball, in his remarkable booklet called "The Third Degree," has explained the word perhaps better than anyone else. Let us heed his words:

"But since we cannot attain this master's word, 'a pure and blameless life,' why are we so continuously admonished to seek for it? Why seek for that which we cannot find? Why this ceaseless, endless search for perfection and truth, only to receive a substitute? Because in the very seeking for the master's word, 'a pure and blameless life' we come nearer to it. Like the cathedral spires of Gothic architecture, which point upward although they never reach heaven, we find that in our seeking after perfection, we come nearer and nearer to it.

"The seeking for the Master's Word,

therefore, is the real purpose of Masonry – that hieroglyphic moral system of types, emblems, and allegories. It should be the purpose and the object of every true and worthy brother to find this master’s word. With the thought of the unity of God, the hope of immortality, and the seeking after the perfect life, we will build a temple that will be eternal. We will also exercise that charity toward the weaknesses and failings of others, which is incumbent on all Masons.”

When Is a Man a Mason?

Joseph Fort Newton ends his great book, “The Builders,” with a paragraph that has been translated into many tongues.

“When is a man a Mason? When he can look out over the rivers, the hills, and the far horizon with a profound sense of his own littleness in the vast scheme of things, and yet have faith, hope and courage – which is the roof of every virtue. When he knows that down in his heart every man is as noble, as vile, as divine, as diabolic, and as lonely as himself, and seeks to know, to forgive, and to love his

fellow man. When he knows how to sympathize with men in their sorrows, yea, even in their sins – knowing that each man fights a hard battle against many odds. When he has learned how to make friends and to keep them, and above all how to keep friends with himself. When he loves flowers, can hunt the birds without a gun, and feels the thrill of an old forgotten joy when he hears the laugh of a little child. When he can be happy and high-minded amid the meaner drudgeries of life. When star-crowned trees, and the glint of sunlight of flowing waters, subdue him like the thought of one much loved and long dead. When no voice of distress reaches his ears in vain, and no hand seeks his aid without response. When he finds good in every faith that helps any man to lay hold of divine things and sees majestic meanings in life, whatever the name of that faith may be. When he can look into a wayside puddle and see something beyond mud, and into the face of the most forlorn fellow mortal and see something beyond sin. When he knows how to pray, how to love, how to hope. When he has kept faith with himself, with his fellow man, with his God; in his hand a sword for evil, in his heart a bit

of song – glad to live, but not afraid to die! Such a man has found the only real secret of Masonry, and the one which it is trying to give to all the world.”

Declaration of Principles

The following declaration of principles may be regarded as a broad definition of Masonry, and because of its importance, it is here presented; study it thoroughly, and apply its standards to your daily life.

Pursuant to the settled policy of this Grand Lodge to define and reaffirm, from time to time, certain of the fundamental principles and rules of conduct governing the practice of Freemasonry in this Masonic jurisdiction, it is declared that:

- 1. The Grand Lodge of North Carolina is a sovereign and independent body practicing Freemasonry only within the three degrees commonly known amongst the craft as the degrees of symbolic Masonry, and only within the limits defined in its Constitution, and in the exercise of its sovereign power, this Grand Lodge further de-*

clares that it does not recognize nor admit the existence of any superior Masonic authority anywhere in the world, however styled.

- 2. Freemasonry is a charitable society in that it is not organized for profit and none of its income insures to the benefit of any individual, but all is devoted to the promotion of the welfare and happiness of mankind.*
- 3. It is benevolent in that it teaches and exemplifies altruism as a duty.*
- 4. It is educational in that it teaches by prescribed ceremonials a system of morality and brotherhood based upon the sacred law.*
- 5. It is religious in that it teaches monotheism; the Holy Bible is open upon its altars whenever a lodge is in session, reverence for God is ever present in its ceremonial, and to its brethren are constantly addressed lessons of morality yet it is not sectarian or theological.*

6. *It is a social organization only so far as it furnishes additional inducement for men to foregather in numbers; more material is thereby provided for its primary work of education, of worship, and of charity.*
7. *Through improvement and strengthening of the character of the individual man, Freemasonry seeks to improve the community. Thus it impresses upon its members the principles of personal righteous and personal responsibility, enlightens them as to those things which make for human welfare, and inspires them with that feeling of charity, or good will, toward all mankind which will move them to translate principle and conviction into action.*
8. *To that end, it teaches and stands for philanthropy; and for enlightenment and orderly liberty, civil, religious, and intellectual. It charges each of its members to be true and loyal to the government of the country to which he owes allegiance, and to be obedient to the laws of any state in which he may be.*

9. *It believes that the attainment of these objectives is best accomplished by laying a broad basis of principle upon which men of every race, country, sect, and opinion may unite rather than by setting up a restricted platform upon which only those of certain races, creeds, and opinions can assemble.*
10. *Consistently throughout the two centuries of Freemasonry in the United States, the members have exercised their inherent and absolute right of freedom of thought and action in all matters religious and civil, but solely as individuals and never as Masons. No member or officer of whatever grade has the right to speak or act for, or in the name of, or on behalf of Freemasonry except as to matters definitely Masonic. Believing and practicing these things, this Grand Lodge affirms its continued adherence to those ancient and approved rules of Freemasonry which forbid the discussion in Masonic lodges or meetings of creeds, politics, or other topics likely to excite personal animosities or personal differences.*

