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THE FUNDAMENTAL PHILOSOPHIC SECRETS WITHIN MASONRY

We are to speak of the fundamental philosophic secrets concealed within the Masonic system. These our system declares to be many and invaluable and to be kept by Masons in their hearts. They are therefore obviously to be distinguished from the merely formal secrets imparted ceremonially, which are kept in the head and are neither many nor of any value, though (as we shall see) they are deeply significant.

By these secrets, then, is not meant some definite precise information that can be imparted to or withheld from another person at will, but the arcane truths inherent in the system itself; truths needing to be extracted from it, like poetry or music from the printed page, by personal effort and that can be recognised as truths only by the inward responsiveness of the soul itself after deeply meditating and assimilating them. Hence we are taught that they are matters of the heart, and that they are communicable only to brethren and fellows (that is, to those whose minds have developed a common measure of spirituality), and then not orally, but only by means of signs, tokens and perfect points of entrance. By points of entrance is meant appropriate faculties of perception and understanding. For just as to enter into perception and understanding of the outer world we need our five outward-pointing senses, so for perception and appreciation of the inner world, we need a corresponding inward sensorium. The pentagram or five pointed star indicates our five points of entrance into relations with the world of sense and phenomena by the limited imperfect channels of the senses; and, to cognise the secret things of supra-sensual life, we must have developed corresponding, but perfect points of entrance into it in the form of soul-faculty, inward vision, inward audition. Hence inward truths and mysteries are inevitably and automatically secret from those who have not yet acquired perfect points of entrance to them, not because of any capricious withholding of them by some better informed

person, but because such men are without the appropriate faculty for perceiving them; their inner vision is as yet hoodwinked, darkened, and prevented from recognising them.

For all Masons, for all the world, ultimate Truth and all the mysteries of being are an ever-open secret. But because all the world isn't yet ripe for knowing that secret, or doesn't want to know it, or imagines either that it isn't knowable or that it knows it already, or at least as much of it as is needed for present purposes, it continues secret, refusing to be revealed save on its own terms, and lying, as the old simile tells, at the dark bottom of a well, which well is our own soul-depths, from which it can only be drawn by our own industry and effort. Hence we find secret orders always existing for initiation into these secrets and mysteries, and in these days when we see our own Order so little concerning itself with such things but preferring to direct its energies rather to social and secular purposes, it is useful to reflect that the sole justification for a secret Order is that it is intended to provide specialised instruction and combined fraternal effort for those desirous to draw apart from these activities of the outer world and enter a quiet sanctuary where they may contemplate and, God helping, perchance attain personal realisation of things which, in their nature, must always remain secret to the uninitiated and outside their consciousness.

Before reaching the heart of our subject I wish to refer to a preliminary matter, and to point out that the text of our rituals and lectures discloses a strange combination of two very different and easily distinguishable levels of teaching; a lower and common-place level which is simple and intelligible to everyone; and a higher and distinctly esoteric level relating to matters of advanced philosophic wisdom.

To the lower level belong the various charges and counsels to morality, and such matters as the simple explanations of the cardinal and other virtues and of the elementary symbolism of building tools. These are matters of no philosophic significance. They have nothing about them distinctive of a secret science or an Initiatory Order. They inculcate only what might be imparted to non-Masons. The ideals of conduct they proclaim are not higher or other than any uninitiated man of rectitude and good feeling normally acts upon, whilst their interpretations of symbolism are adapted to a quite puerile order of intelligence. Of themselves they do not justify the existence of a Secret Order and an elaborate organisation to perpetuate them, and their sole advantage is that they serve as the foothills to the higher peaks of doctrine and provide a common basis of elementary understanding and conduct among the members of a Society the majority of whom do not look for or aspire to anything more than good fellowship and pleasant social relations, which could just as easily be found in the outside world.

To the higher level, however, belong matters of an entirely different order of instructiveness, matters drawn from and linking us directly with older and advanced systems of philosophic and experimental Mysticism beyond the mental horizon of the average Brother who for want of requisite preparation and instruction (for which also he too often has neither aptitude nor desire), is not only at a loss to understand the main features of our system, but is precluded from vitally benefiting from it. So he remains an initiate in name only, not in fact, whilst the Order instead of cultivating the secret science and royal art to which, nevertheless, it pays much empty lip-service, degenerates into a vast semi-public social and benevolent institution conducted upon the same lines and in the same spirit as characterise the outer world, against which our doors are theoretically meant to be shut and closely tiled. How many

Masons could say what initiation really is and involves? How many could explain the doctrine of the centre, the meaning of the circle and the point within it, and the two grand parallel lines bounding it, or the implications of the structure and contents of a Lodge, of the Blazing Star or Glory at the centre, or manifest any personal experience of the mystical death dramatised in our Third Degree? How many could explain all that is meant by the Star in the East or testify to its rising in actual spiritual experience and not merely in symbolic ceremony, bringing with its rising the peace and salvation to which that Degree alludes and that open vision, cosmic and beatific, which the Royal Arch ceremony attempts faintly to portray?

Yet all these matters and many more lie enshrined and embedded within the simpler and more obvious material of our system and in seeking to disentangle and consider them the question arises how is this admixture of elementary exoteric teaching with advanced esoteric references to be accounted for? Was it due to limited knowledge, clumsiness and muddleheadedness on the part of the compilers of Speculative Masonry (as has been suggested by some able Masonic exponents) or was it intentional? The former view is taken for instance in the admirable Masonic papers in Bro. A. E. Waite's *Studies in Mysticism*, where it is suggested that the 18th century worthies who framed our rituals and lectures possessed little or no esoteric knowledge and a very imperfect conception of the real purpose of an Initiatory system. By some means, into which we need not now inquire, there had come into their hands from remoter sources the salient features of such a system, obviously and faithfully perpetuating the self-perfecting doctrine taught in the philosophic Mysteries of the past and common to all the secret schools of both East and West; a system of whose full significance it is suggested that they were unaware yet one which they were intuitively moved to preserve, and which they amplified and put forward clothed with some well-meant but cheap and tawdry garnishings of their own. They were moralists rather than mystics. Their ideal seems to have been not the sublime attainments of the perfected initiate who finds and lives from his centre but, as their ponderous grandiloquence puts it, merely to "become a worthy member of Society," to "rise in the scale of moral excellence" and to "live respected and die regretted." Not spiritual Mastership, but smug respectability, seems on the surface to have been the limit of their ambition, consistently with which they obsequiously sought the patronage of royalty and aristocracy to give the Order social dignity and attractiveness and render it free from suspicion of being a cloak for political intrigue.

To this view of the conduct of our 18th century progenitors, there is a possible alternative which, in fairness to them, may be advanced rather because it is possible than that it can now be proved. It is that, in anticipation of Speculative Masonry proving attractive to numbers of men not yet likely to appreciate the profounder aspects of Initiation science, they deliberately diluted the system by weaving into it a body of simple ethical ideals within the compass of everyone's understanding. In this way they conserved the vital points of the traditional secret doctrine for the benefit of those who could recognise and profit by them and at the same time they effectively crypticised and concealed them from those who could not.

To state a personal conviction, I do not believe that Speculative Masonry was instituted with the intention of becoming the social and money-raising organisation into which it has since drifted. Sociability and relief — but not merely financial relief — were obvious side-consequences of such an

institution, but primarily it was a movement made from behind the scenes of public history towards perpetuating an ancient secret doctrine for the sake of those who might discern and profit by it in the epoch of spiritual sterility, materialism and religious disruption into which we had fallen and through which we are still passing. As one of our lectures truly affirms, the world is never left without witness to the ancient traditional science by following which man may recover "that which is lost," the ruined empire of his own soul, and scrutiny of human events indicates that at all times, behind and within humanity, there stand watchers, guardians, guides, initiates, charged with the task of keeping the witness alive, however faintly, and unobtrusively steering the race towards its destiny of ultimate spiritual perfection. So closely linked is our Masonic system with other and far more advanced expressions of that science that the conclusion is irresistible that it stands in the chain of direct succession with them and was designed to perpetuate the same doctrine. If this be so, the movement projected some 250 years ago has been justified in that it has familiarised vast numbers of minds with at least an elementary and notional acquaintance with a path of progress which sooner or later we must all realise in vital experience, We may regret, though we need not despair, that of those numbers so few even pass from the foot-hills of the subject to the heights of its full understanding and personal experiment, but was it not declared thousands of years ago that "the candidates are many but the perfected initiates few," and again, still later, "that Many are called but few are chosen?" Yet those few are ever ready and anxious to pass on the torch to others and it is perhaps from its light that is due the increasing desire of so many in the Order to-day to rise to a fuller appreciation of what its doctrine holds in concealment and will yield up to those who truly seek it.

Leaving behind us now the mere elementary ethics and symbolism of the Craft and coming to its fundamental philosophic secrets, we have first to ask ourselves what has always been and still is the grand aim and purpose of initiation? Whether in the East, in Egypt, Greece, or elsewhere, and in all eras, it has been indicated by the formula "know thyself;" it has been to bring a man to conscious realisation of that which is the root and basic essence of his being. It is that and nothing else, and our 3rd Degree refers to this when it speaks of the chief of all human studies being the "knowledge of yourself."

Now to realise a thing is not merely to have notions of it, but to become it, to make it a living reality, to become wholly identified with it. And what is the root and basic essence of our being with which we are to become identified, the self we are advised to get to know? And here we are at once driven against that which is the root-cause of all Masonic silence and secrecy. For this basic essence is something nameless, unspeakable, something beyond all verbal and mental categories, yet not, thank God, beyond feeling, for the heart can know and feel what the head fails to comprehend. Yet to cast it into verbal coinage for the purpose of exchanging ideas, it passes by several names. The East calls it the "Self" (Atman) the self-radiant, self-intelligent unitary root of being and deathless source of all derivative life and multiplicity. The Greek schools called it Autos, the self-contained or self-subsistent, the One or the Good. The Hebrews describe it as the sacred and unpronounceable name of four letters, Tetragrammaton, or as Adonai, while Christians personalise it as God in so far as He is immanent in the soul as its concealed vitalising spirit. And Masonry describes it variously as the "vital and immortal principle," as Adoniram, as the Blazing Star or Glory at our centre, as the Light of a Master Mason which never goes out even when all our other lights (or faculties) fail, because it is eternal and immortal whilst

our other faculties are temporal and perishable. But by whatever name we label it, however shadowy and imperfect our thought of it, that it is with which we are to become consciously identified by a direct act of self-knowledge, for, as the teaching uniformly declares, the secret of all secrets is that "Thou art THAT." To realise this, not merely notionally, but in fulness of direct experience, has always been and still is the goal of wisdom and the goal of Initiatory science. It is to become seated and established in the chair of King Solomon. It is to pass from mere manhood and the carnal understanding to conscious Godhood whilst we are still in the flesh. It is the realisation of our fundamental unity and identity with ultimate of ultimates. It is the ex-perience to which in our Third Degree the Mason is told to lift his eyes in expectation of realising it, and which is likened to the glory of a star whose rising brings peace and salvation, and is still more elaborately dramatised in the finding of the Lost Word and the great vision attained at the restoration to light in the Royal Arch ceremony.

If this, then, be the purpose and goal of Initiation, the fundamental hypothesis and philosophic secret of Masonry is the solemn fact that God and the human soul are in essence a unity, not a duality, and the sole intention of our Initiatory-system is, by instruction and discipline, to bring about in each of us the conscious realisation of that unity.

Is not such hypothesis of necessity a secret? For if it is to become realised in personal experience, it is an experience which must be prepared for in secret, be realised in secret, and remain secret, incomprehensible, and incommunicable to everyone save those in the silence of whose breast it becomes experimentally achieved. Moreover, treating Initiation-science purely from a historical standpoint, it could be shown that this was always the fundamental religious and philosophic arcanum of every Initiation-system that has existed, one, that under pain of dire penalties for its disclosure, was always rigorously withheld from the uninitiated world with whose less matured religious outlook it was bound to clash. Whence it comes that, following this wise practice, Masonry leaves every man to follow his own religion, in the certain knowledge that every religion, however crude or imperfect, leads ultimately to the one centre and is a preparation for what can be realised in its fulness only by initiation.

Masonry therefore, like every Initiation-system, is not non-religious, but super-sectarian, and directed to secrets and mysteries of Being with which popular religion does not deal. It is ontological and philosophic, but not theological. Indeed it "jumps" all the theologies and so avoids the endless bickerings and disputations to which in the outer world they have given birth, and it eschews all credal dogmas — save one. In its Constitutions Masonry posits and exacts acquiescence in but one sole dogma — the Being of God. It wisely leaves that dogma unexplained and to be interpreted by each according to his light. But its acceptance, as you know, is insisted upon as pre-requisite to membership of the Order, and the reason for the insistence is that unless God and conscious union with Him as our divine and basic Principle be postulated as our object of desire and goal of attainment, there is no merit, no virtue, no purpose, in initiation rites.

Religious thought and ideas of Deity have, of course, travelled a long way since the time when the arcanum we are speaking of could never be breathed outside Temples of Initiation from fear of clashing with popular religion. To-day, despite the survival in certain quarters of much that is crude, anthropomorphic and unthinkable, a sincere and healthy agnosticism has broken up the caked soil of

many former theological notions and made possible the growth of a new and mystical Gnosis. One might even say that in its great earnest quest for knowledge of the secrets and mysteries of life, society of to-day, in so far as it devotes attention to that quest, is collectively taking as it were a new degree of Initiation, and like a hoodwinked candidate shuffling along with irregular steps and uncertainty whither it is going, is slowly and darkly probing its way towards the Light. The need for disciplined instruction and initiation into the secrets and mysteries of Being, however, still exists for all of us as much as it ever did in antiquity, and we in the Craft possess, therefore, an advantage over those who are not in it, for if we will but rightly interpret and use it, we have in our Order a specialised system of guidance upon the path that leads to the Eternal East and the Master of Life. Shall we not therefore make the most of our privilege and with gratitude bow to that Master for the foresight which provided it for us?

Let us now pass on to seeing how the process of attaining self-knowledge and realisation of the basic essence of our being is inculcated in our system. Take first the Apron, that prominent, most personal, and most instructive of all our emblems, since it is the visible symbol of the constitution of each of us. It consists of a pyramidal or triangular flap superimposed upon a quadrangular base, thus representing the two main divisions into which each of us is separable. The triangular flap stands for the spiritual essence, the germ of Divine Fire; it expresses man as he subsists in perfection and in the Divine idea. The quadrangular base stands for material man as he exists imperfectly and as a personality in the flesh. The former is our ultimate real, true, immortal self, the latter is a transient, perishable and therefore unreal self. The normal uninitiated man knows only this unreal illusory self, and therefore exists in a state of darkness and blindness to his concealed true being. The object and discipline of Initiation is to reverse this position by, as it were, turning a man inside out, so bringing forward into consciousness and function the higher part which has been obscured and submerged and, as a necessary corollary, repressing and putting out of action the contrary claims and activities of his lower ego, the natural Personality.

Our system therefore asks us to think of the triangular flap as the sacramental sign of the presence in ourselves of the Divine Essence, an Essence which, because it is Divine, comprises all the attributes of Divinity--all knowledge, all power, all wisdom, strength and beauty. In our basic, real self, each of us is all that; each of us is, as the flame-shaped pyramidal emblem is meant to indicate, a "tongue of fire," a spiritual flamelet from the primordial infinite fire of Universal spirit, but as yet unconscious of the fact and without realised experience of it. And the reason of our unconsciousness of it is accounted for by the fact that this real essential has become imprisoned, obscured and submerged within a vesture or coating of something alien to it, of which the emblem is the quadrangular portion of the Apron. The union of the two parts of the Apron figures the union of the spiritual and material parts of our organisation, and the drawing down of the flap upon the base testifies to the fall of spirit into matter, a fall involving loss of consciousness on the part of the spirit through becoming straightened by the limitations and polluted by the impurities of sensual existence.

Now the science of initiation was and still is to promote the separation and eventual emancipation of the spiritual Essence, our true self, from this material thralldom, and the Craft Degrees are a dramatisation of the emancipating process. The misconception widely obtains, even among the Craft, that emancipation becomes automatically effected upon the death of the material body. But this is not

the teaching of the ancient science, which declares that somatic death involves only the dissociation of the lower elements of our nature without ensuring the liberation of the enthralled Divine Essence, unless that liberation has been previously effected by initiation during physical life. Hence the supreme importance always attached to awaking that Essence into self-consciousness whilst we are still in the flesh and the requisite mechanism of all our parts and faculties is present. For the physical body is the “tomb of transformation” in which the great change-over has to be effected and, “the night cometh when no man can work” at this task of emancipation and, as the teaching runs, further physical incarnation will be necessary as opportunity to resume it.

The process of Initiation is therefore one of regeneration and bringing forward the inmost essence first to birth and eventually to full growth, and of necessity it involves a corresponding degeneration, renunciation, and mystical death of all the lower principles that obstruct the transformation. It is outlined for us with utmost clearness in our three Degrees, and progress in it is signified by changes and elaborations in the Apron. The first stage involves the purification and subdual of the gross sense-nature and the killing out of desire for all material attractions and indifference to the allurements of the outer world. The second involves the discipline and clarifying of the mind till it becomes pure and strong enough to respond to a supernatural order of life and wisdom, and it is therefore in our Second Degree that in the discovery of a sacred symbol in the centre of the building is indicated the first glimpsing of the presence of the Divine Essence at our personal centre, and the desire to eradicate from the heart all obstacles to complete union with it. The third stage, the “last and greatest trial,” involves the voluntary dying down of the entire natural self-hood and even the destruction of our sense of ego-ism in separation from the Universal Life-Essence, until that Essence displaces the former limited personal Ego and rises into permanent consciousness as a bright morning star, one of those stars or self-radiant beings which, it is written, “sang together” in the dawn of creation, and that will once more sing together in eternal union and harmony when the great work of emancipation of our spirits from material bondage has been consummated.

Turn now to a few minor secrets that still further illustrate what has been said and consider the concealed significance of the official signs of the Craft and Arch Degrees. In the surface explanation of those signs they are made to allude to penalties attached to breaches of our obligations, and it is well known that those penalties correspond with those formerly prescribed for high treason and other crimes against the State. This surface explanation, however, is but camouflage. The real significance lies deeper.

Take the sign of the 1st Degree. It is obviously a sign of decapitation, but a decapitation to be understood not physically but mystically. Its meaning is that the head (or natural human reason) being an inadequate faculty for apprehending the sublime supernatural facts of the spirit must be content to renounce its powers and become, as it were, cut off, beheaded, before ultimate supreme verities can be cognised. Among the spiritual alchemists this is often referred to as “cutting off the head of the black crow,” that sombre bird being taken as a figure of the natural reason. The natural mind is adapted solely to the cognition of natural phenomena; spiritual things, which to it are foolishness and unrealities, must

be spiritually perceived; spirit alone can cognise spirit. It is of course true that the natural mind, when disciplined and purified, becomes lit up, illuminated and strengthened by the cognitions of the spirit; the point is that in virtue of its own natural powers it is not, and never can be, the appropriate cognising organ; it must utterly abase itself and evacuate its powers, in other words be cut off. Summa scientia nihil scire is the maxim here applicable; supreme knowledge comes only when the mind is emptied of all lesser knowledge. When therefore in our first Degree the Mason stands to salute his Worshipful Master let him remember that the gesture signifies the homage he should pay to what is worshipful in himself, namely, his own Master-principle, the Divine Essence immanent in himself, for the Master of a Lodge symbolically personifies that Master-principle; let him reflect that he must abrogate and behead his natural reason and understanding if he ever hopes to participate in that supreme wisdom of which King Solomon and his symbolic successors are the personified types. And, as the Queen of Sheba abased herself to the dust before the regal and unparalleled splendour of that monarch, so let him read behind this allegory and recognise that the visions that open to the awakened spirit in man utterly transcend the ideas of our natural intelligence and that the natural eye hath not seen nor ear heard things which nevertheless can be seen and heard by those who make the necessary self-surrender and acquire the necessary faculty and points of entrance.* [* In further illustration, consider the beheading of John the Baptist as symbolising the necessity of renouncing the natural mentality before the Christ-consciousness can supersede it; “He must increase, and I must decrease” and see further the pointed allusion in Rev. xx., 4. W. Bro. Sir Frederick Pollock kindly sends me further confirmation by pointing to the frequent allusion in mystical writings to “headlessness,” as figuring total self-ahnegation and absorption of the mind in God (the super-conscious state of ecstasy or Sarnadhi), and by quoting the following from the great Sufi poet Jalaluddin Rumi (13th century)]

If the 1st Degree sign relates to the head, that of the 2nd Degree refers to the heart, and the heart must be kept with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life; out of it come the wellings forth of the central, self-radiant, self-knowing Essence. The sign therefore indicates the necessity of cleansing the affections and the mind, and casting out their impurities, so that the glory at the centre may the more effectually shine through. Not to the clever in head, but to the simple and pure in heart, comes the great experience of beatific vision disclosed later on in the Royal Arch Degree. The point is further emphasised in the Masonic steps. Following ancient tradition, every step is taken with the left foot, the right foot being then drawn up to it, for the left is the side of the heart as the right is associated with the head. In the pursuit of the mysteries of Being, precedence must ever be given to the intuitions of the heart; the rational understanding must be subordinated to those instincts, follow in their rear and be brought up into alignment with them, for “the heart has its reasons, of which the reason itself does not know.”

When thou see'st in the pathway a severed head

Which is bounding towards our field,

Ask of it, ask of it, the secrets of the heart,

For of it thou wilt learn our hidden mystery.

The Third Degree signs obviously refer to the Centre itself, and to experiences encountered upon our approach to it; they relate not only to certain functions of the physical centre (the solar plexus), but to the Divine Essence centralised within us and constituting the bidden basis of our being. The sign of the Royal Arch degree is equally obvious. It is that of those humble sancti-fied souls, the people who “have received mercy,” in that to them has been accorded the supreme grace of attaining conscious union with that which is perfect and all-holy and who shield their eyes before the overpowering splendour of the vision that has opened out to them.

Next let us turn to that impressive piece of ritual which lends so much awe and mystery to the closing of the Lodge in the Third Degree. The genuine secrets of Master Masonry are then declared to have become lost and, in the intimate posture of the five points of fellowship, words are uttered telling that “the Master is smitten”; an announcement so solemn, so mysterious, that it is normally permitted to be uttered only beneath the breath. Yet no sooner has it thus been uttered than the Master directs it to be once more proclaimed, but this time aloud, so that all may hear and, if they have ears of inward hearing, realise its gravity and significance. What genuine secrets have been lost? What Master has been smitten? Why that hushed whisper and the subsequent proclamation of the words aloud? And why are those words directed to serve as substituted secrets and to distinguish all Master Masons until time and circumstances restore the genuine ones?

If Brethren understood the implication they would surely better appreciate the purpose of the Craft and put it to higher uses than they do. For in this incident is not only enshrined the fundamental doctrine of the Order, but a truth is declared affecting all human life. It is a pronouncement of cosmic loss and dereliction. Not a historic Hiram or any allegoric personality is it that is smitten, but the Divine and Grand Master-principle of our being “slain from the foundation of the world,” of which Hiram is used as the personified type. This it is which in our present natural state is cut off from us, smitten and overpowered by our own ruffian disorderly wills and sensual effections, so that we live, not by its light, but in outer darkness of our own making; not in conscious possession of the genuine secrets of our true being; not in fulness of wisdom and perfection of faculty, but by virtue only of our limited natural reason and our illusory senses. As we are now we do not live front the centre of life, but from its circumference; we do not know Reality and Being in its wholeness and perfection; we know only phenomena, relativity and the shadows and husks of real things; we live but a secondary derivative existence at the periphery — a life of endless flux and decay, of strife and pain, futility and death, which are the signs that must and will continue to distinguish us until time and circumstances restore to us that which is lost, conscious union with our root of being. And so finding this peripheral existence one of relative illusion and unsatisfying vanities, as sooner or later we all do, we recognise that some vital factor is wanting to us, and we go here and there in our blind searchings after it, as it were exclaiming M—! M—! and with bated breath whispering to one another the dread secret that the Master is smitten and that with him the true secrets of our being are lost also.

This is the great truth so dramatically testified to in the closing of the Third Degree, and it is the truth which alone explains and justifies the existence of Initiation-systems to remedy it. For the purpose of Initiation ever was, and still is, to effect the restoration in the individual soul of its candidates of that which from their heart they recognise they have lost, but desire to regain. A real initiate is one in whom

that restoration has become fully (or even partially) achieved, as it may be by any of us by our own industry and the assistance of the Master-principle within us. The full, complete restoration is graphically depicted for us ceremonially in the Third Degree in the symbolic act of raising the candidate from — to — and his becoming then drawn into identic union and fellowship with his Master-principle, whilst it is elaborated still farther in the gorgeous rite of the Royal Arch. For him who has received the mercy of this great experience in fact and not merely in ceremony, the words ‘The Master is smitten!’ no longer apply, but rather “The Master is risen!” for he has reached the soul’s true Easter-day, and that vital and immortal principle which has risen in him can proclaim through his regenerated organism “I am he that liveth and was dead and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen, and hold the keys of hell and of death!” For that is Mastership, the goal of the excellent and perfect Mason, and the recovery of both the lost secrets and the lost powers of our genuine being, for attaining which it is open to each of us whose desire is ardent enough, to make our own time and create the requisite circumstances.

This would appear to be the conclusion of our subject. But one more point must be made, for, far as our Craft Degrees and their extension in the Royal Arch carry us, there remains one greater height still. The supreme climax of our system is to be looked for in the implications of the Ceremony of Installation. This, I regret, cannot be spoken of adequately or with the fulness it deserves except inside a Board of Installed Masters. Yet let a word be said upon it here, for if there be one piece of our ritual more than another that one would fain see rescued from the misunderstanding that so often desecrates it, it is that of the enthronement into the chair of King Solomon.

Blind are the eyes that see in this wonderful and moving rite merely the induction of an annually chosen new governor of a Lodge. More darkened still is the mind that treats attainment to the Chair of Wisdom as a matter of self-satisfaction at the fulfilment of a private ambition and makes it, after the manner of the secular world, an occasion for personal glorification and intensified carousal. For behind all the personal compliment and the formal conventions necessarily attaching to it as a temporal event, there lurks the profound and pride-humbling spiritual significance of its symbolism, the sacramental veils of which our vision should be trained to pierce.

In that symbolism Royal Solomon is no historic character, but our latent Master-principle personified; he is the embodiment of the conjoined wisdom, strength and beauty characterising the root of our being from which we are now cut off, but to regain which is the end of the philosophical quest. The “Chair of King Solomon,” is a metaphor of the perfected soul’s ultimate sedes gestatoria, and the occasion of installation should be regarded as the symbol of its Feast of Assumption thereinto. For there, after the aspirant’s upward toil, the path of Initiation terminates, and the builder of the house not made with hands enters that rest which remaineth for those who outgrow the ranks of humanity and pass into the order of Divinity and Mastership. In words used in another connection he is made to “sit down at the right of God,” clothed with all the attributes and executive powers of divine vice-regency.

Thus behind the personal honour accorded to a Brother called to the chair of Wisdom is dramatised the enthronement of the soul upon the utmost height of its being; and when we look up to and salute a newly installed Master, wearing the regalia of that supreme office, bearing the symbols of plenary power and entrusted with absolute control of his Lodge and its property, let us translate this visible

imagery into its spiritual and impersonal value, and lift our eyes and hearts to contemplation of that sublime moment when the perfected soul, reaching its throne of rest and peace surpassing understanding, enters its true kingdom, receives the power, and wears the self-radiant vesture of glory, for ever and ever.

In these reflections I have tried to dissect some of the deeper and more vital arcana of the Craft from the mass of superficial moral teaching amidst which it lies imbedded and, as I think, deliberately veiled. There remain for contemplation many other valuable philosophic secrets which would require not one, but a series of papers to discuss. Some of these would probably startle and even give offence to the natural mind until it learns to abase and behead itself and to receive hidden wisdom with the unsophisticated vision of a child.

Better therefore defer their consideration for the present. When as the result of the discipline and industry prescribed by our system, we become conscious of the Blazing Star or Glory at our centre rising and expanding more and more in us its self-convincing light will itself disclose to us and justify all that now lies secret and unexplained, but, as the Great Master of the West enjoined, until it be risen from the dead in our hearts we are to tell the vision to no man (see Matthew xvii., 9.), whilst following the same instruction, Masonry directs us to lock up our secrets in the heart's safe, and sacred repository.

Yet what has been said may perhaps suffice to indicate something of the invaluable light and wisdom concealed within our system, and since there is nothing hid which shall not be revealed in due course and to the properly prepared, we may regard the increasing anxiety of so many Brethren to-day to realise more fully the true content and purpose of our Order, as a sign that at last, after a long period of darkness and perversity, the Light of the Centre is gradually breaking over the Craft and restoring, to at least the more faithful and zealous of its members, the knowledge of the lost but genuine secrets of their being. By W. L. WILMSHURST, P.M. 275, P.P.G.Reg. West Yorks.



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