

The Lodge

By Unknown

"God hath made mankind one vast Brotherhood, Himself their Master, and the World His Lodge."

Out of an old, dark abyss a whirling fire-mist emerged, and the world was made. Ages afterwards a race of men began to walk about on its surface and ask what it means. Dimly aware that things are more than they seem to be, man sought in the order of nature and in the depths of his own being for a clue to the questions which haunted his mind: What is the world? How did it come to be? Why does it exist? Has it a Mind, a Purpose, a Plan? Why is man here? What is he sent to do and be? What is life for? What is its meaning, its duty, its hope? Is death the end? Where does man go when he falls into a still, strange sleep, and does not wake up?

Such faith as man won from the mystery of life, such truth as he learned by living, he set forth in sign and symbol, in sacred rite and ceremony, in the Temple and the Lodge. For, next to the Home and the House of Prayer, the Lodge is the oldest Shrine of humanity - so ancient is the idea and art of initiation, as far back as the earliest ages. Rituals, if not the oldest records of the race, show us man the mystic, telling himself the truth until it is real and vivid, seeking to lift his life into higher rhythm of reality .

The men's house was the center of tribal society, the place where youth was tried, trained, and taught the secret lore of the race. Its rites were crude - often, no doubt, cruel - as all things were in the beginning; but their intent was to test men before intrusting to them treasures which had cost so much and must not be lost. Always the crowning rite of initiation was a drama of the immortal life, revealing man undefeated by death, keeping his hidden treasure - by virtue of that in him which has never accepted utter identity with outward force and fact.

Ages later, by the same mystic insight, the art of initiation was linked with the art of building. Back of this blending of two arts lay the truth that the life of man must reproduce the law and order of the world in which he lives. So every Temple became a symbol of the world - its floor the earth, its roof the heavens; and every ritual repeated the life and death of man - showing the passage of the soul through nature to Eternity. How impressive it is uniting a truth so old that it is easily overlooked and an insight so simple that men forget its sublimity.

If not by direct historical descent, at least by spiritual affinity the same truth and insight are united in the moral art of Masonry, in which the Lodge is a symbol of the world and the ritual the drama of the life of man. Such an insight is as valid today as it was ages ago, though our idea of the shape of the world - no longer a cube, but a globe - has altered; since its normal order abides, and man must learn to live in harmony with it, building upon the Will of God by His help and in His name.

The world is a Lodge in which man is to learn the Brotherly Life. So Masonry reads the mystery of the world and finds its purpose, its design, its prophecy. It is a simple faith, a profound philosophy, and a practical way of life. How to live is the one matter, and he will wander far without learning a better way than is shown us in the Lodge. Still less may one hope to find an atmosphere more gentle for the growth of the best things, or a wiser method of teaching the truth by which man is inspired and edified.

In the days of Operative Masonry, a Lodge was a hut or a shed, of a temporary kind, near the place where the work was carried on. It was variously used as an office, a storeroom, or a place where the workmen ate and slept together, as we read in the Fabric Rolls of New York Minister, in orders issued to the Craft in 1352. Not unnaturally, in time the name of the room came to describe the associations and meetings of the men using the Lodge Room; and they were called the Lodge. Hence, our habit of speaking of the Fraternity itself as a Lodge, and so it is, since in its symbolic world men are built together in love.

At one time the Tracing Board, as it is called in England, was known as the "Lodge;" as when Preston tells how "The Grand Master," attended by his officers, form themselves in order round the Lodge, which is placed in the center, covered with white satin." Again, in the Book of Constitutions, 1784, we read of "Four Tylers carrying the Lodge covered with white satin;" as if it were a mystic Ark of the Covenant, as used in certain Masonic ceremonies. Such a use of the word has passed away, or well nigh so, along with the practice. For us the Lodge is the world, and some trace the word Lodge back to the Sanskrit word "Loga," meaning the world. However that may be, manifestly it goes back to the days when men thought the world was square, and to live "On the Square" meant to be at one with the order of the world. Also, since the Lodge is "The Place where Masons Work," its form, position, dimension, covering and support are likewise symbolical of the conditions in which man lives, going forth to his labor until in the evening, and the night cometh when no man can work. As Goethe put it in his poem:

The Mason's ways are A Type of Existence,
And his persistence Is as the days are
Of men in this world.

By the same token, if the Lodge is the world, so initiation is a symbol of our birth into it. But it is only an analogy, and may be pressed too far, as is often done, leaving it cloudy with ideas which have no place in it. For the Masonic initiation is a symbol of our birth out of the dim sense life into a world of moral values and spiritual vision; out of the animal into the angel. Not

to see that it is a moral and spiritual birth, in which the hoodwinks of the flesh are removed, is to miss both its meaning and its beauty.

Back of the art and practice of initiation, in the olden time, lay a profound idea, never better told than in the Hymn of the Soul in an old book called the "Acts of Thomas." The story is told by the Soul itself, of its descent from the house of its Father, to Egypt to fetch a Pearl away. Before it left its heavenly home, its White Robe and Scarlet Tunic were removed, and it went naked into a far country in quest of a Pearl of great price, to find which all else might well be given up.

In Egypt the Soul eats of the food of the land, forgets its Father and serves the King of Egypt - forgets the Pearl, as if overcome by a deep sleep. But a Letter is sent to it by its Father, bidding it remember that it is the son of a King, and to call to mind the Pearl and the White Robe left above. The Letter flies in the likeness of an eagle. The Soul awakes, seizes the Pearl, strips off its filthy, unclean dress, and sets off eastward and homeward, guided by the light of the Letter, from Egypt, past Babylon to Maisham on the sea.

There the Soul meets the White Robe, and because it only dimly remembered its fashion - for in its childhood it had left the Robe in its Father's House - the Robe became a mirror of the Soul. "All over it the instincts of knowledge were working." The White Robe speaks and tells how it grew as the Soul grew, and then of itself it invests the Soul with that of which it had been divested - a perfect fit - and the Soul returns to its Home, like the Prodigal Son in the parable of Jesus. Thus our initiation is a return of the Soul, along a dim, hard path, led by a Shining Letter hung up in the Lodge; the discovery by man of who he is, whence he came, and whose son he is.

So understood, the ritual of initiation is a drama of the Eternal Life of man, of the awakening of the Soul and the building of character. For character is built of thoughts, and by thought, and the Lodge offers both a place of quiet and purity and a method by which the work may be carried on, isolated from the confusions of the ordinary life. Sect and party, creed and strife are excluded. Not out of the world, but separate from it, "close tyed," in a chamber of moral imagery, and in the fellowship of men seeking the good life, we may learn what life is and how to live it.

Outside, angry passion and mad ambition fill the earth with their cries. At the door of the Lodge, vice, hate, envy and the evil that work such havoc are left behind. Inside, the Faith that makes us men is taught by old and simple symbols, and the Moral Life becomes as real and vivid as it is lovely. Where, in all the world, is there another such shrine of peace and beauty where men of all ranks, creeds and conditions are drawn together, as brothers of one mystic tie, dedicated and devoted to the best life!

Here, in the Lodge, in a world of the ideal made real, we meet upon the Level and part upon the Square, sons of one Father, brothers in one family, united by oath and insight and a Love which

is Pearl of great value, seeking a truth that makes is fraternal. Outside the home of the House of God there is nothing finer than this old, far embracing Lodge of ennobled humanity.

No hammer fell, nor ponderous axes rung, Like some tall palm the mystic fabric sprung.

"SO MOTE IT BE"

STB - December 1927