

THE NATURE AND PRINCIPLES OF THE INSTITUTION.R.W.P. Grand Master & Brethren.

It is my privilege and duty to address you on the subject of the Nature & Principles of the Mark Degree. You will realise that in so doing it is quite impossible for me to more than introduce the main points of the subject. It has been said of Mark Masonry that, "The Degree brings us at once into a practical atmosphere." In accepting this statement let us understand its meaning to be, the use of some of the things of Operative Masonry to illustrate more clearly the vital principles of our Speculative Science.

No one could have given us a better slogan if we may call it such, than he who coined the statement that Masonry is, "A system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbol." Let me put it to you in another way and say, Masonry consists of a soul or principle, which down the ages has given itself a body, that during the recent centuries has assumed the form in which we have it today. This is I think recognised though not perhaps in the way I put it.

Most authoritative masonic writers recognise it as the "Royal Art," as it was called 200 years ago in the Book of Constitutions of 1723. As one writer says, "An Art which, for the Lodge, the place of instruction, consists in educating its apprentices in Humanity with the help of Masonic symbols; and which, for individual Freemasons, is the art of life, of self-knowledge, of strict self-education, and harmonic mode of living; the art which declares love its greatest commandment; the art of educating the individual soul, as well as mankind, to be the dwelling place of the Eternal."

In Germany, prior to its Nazi madness, the General

Handbook of Freemasonry, said, "Freemasonry is the activity of closely associated men, who, employing symbolic forms work for the welfare of mankind, seeking to ennoble themselves and others, in order to bring into being a universal Brotherhood of Humanity."

So, too, in the Constitutions of Dutch Freemasonry the aim is said to be, "To perfect the individual and guide mankind towards better and more harmonious development.

That the first duty of mankind is to dedicate itself to the welfare of human society and to sacrifice itself if necessary."

Frederick the Great, a ruler in Masonry, says it is, "A means of educating the people to be better members of society, to be more virtuous and more charitable."

Much is heard today about a New World, but how are we to get it? Big wages, fine houses, good clothes, luxurious food and all the other amenities of life will not bring it. Until men adopt a new spirit and principle of life, there can be no New World. Here then is one of the opportunities for Masonry if the above expressions of the fundamental use, purpose and principles of Masonry are correct.

When the young Mason asks if there is anything more to be learned than just the ritual of the ceremony, as the writer has been on more than one occasion, surely the answer should be in agreement with the above quoted expressions.

We vaunt the fact that we are not operative but speculative masons and in the Mark Degree are always reminding ourselves that the working tools must be so understood, since they are in other degrees. We speak of them as symbols of discipline and education but do not add that discipline is truth in action as it orders and directs our lives; whilst education is the development of character as we acquire greater love and harmony to modify our desires and aspirations. Whilst then the form and ceremony of the Lodge is the body of Masonry, its soul or spirit is that which is, "ancient and honourable," and has been handed down from time immemorial. This applies equally to Mark Masonry as to any other degree.

In the earliest known Mark Minute we read that, "At the Royal Arch Chapter held at the George Tavern in Portsmouth on First September 1769 that he, Lunckerley, made the Brethren Mark Masons and Mark Masters." Howell the historian writes, "The Mark Degree has evidently always been a great favourite with the Companions of the Chapter. The evidence seems to show that it was conferred by the Chapter until about the middle of the 19th century.

The candidate in the chapter after he has taken his O. is told that he has been exalted into this Supreme Degree, truly denominated, The Essence of Masonry. At the end of his exaltation he is informed, "When you were raised to the third degree you were informed that the genuine secrets of a M.M. were lost and that certain substituted signs were adopted. These secrets were rediscovered in the manner which has been explained to you this evening."

Dassigny said of the Royal Arch, "It cannot be

treated with too much reverence," and Dermott remarks, "The Royal Arch
I firmly believe to be the root, heart and marrow of Masonry." The Royal
Arch is the custodian of the secrets of Masonry which are symbolic in their
nature but living in their meaning. Grantham in his, "Introduction to
Mark Masonry" says, "The origin of Freemasonry is hidden in the mists of
the dim past long prior to 1717, for Masonry is more than a charitable
organisation or a venue of social intercourse. The Philosophy concealed
within Masonry is too deep to have been tacked on to a nondescript
series of casual theatricals, and if the reality of this inner meaning
be not accepted, nothing remains but an empty shell or make-believe."

This is neither the time or place to go into the
origin and nature of Masonic Symbolism. I have done that in my
pamphlet on, "Masonry and Symbolism," where I have tried to show
that the origin takes us back to the beginning of these things
and illustrates that the soul of Masonry is really ancient and
honourable, and does actually take us back to time immemorial.

Briefly then, when we speak of the "sacred
word," it means more than just syllables of letters; it is
reminiscent of philosophical times when the idea was that of the
Logos or Wisdom. In our search for this we pass through
the three degrees of the Craft and are then led to enter
into the experiences of the Royal Arch. Here a much more
profound knowledge awaits us and we at last stand face to
face with the problem of J.B.O. How many have satisfactorily
solved the mysteries there presented? The student, however,
is not content, his search is for the soul of Masonry. One
thing is noticed the further we go back the more frequent is

the use of Hebrew terms, which in itself is a hint of its ancient origin. But with the recollection of J.B.O. in mind we wonder how far there is a Babylonian trait associated with it. In our search for this inmost of Masonry we trace our way still further back through the philosophies of Alexandria to the mysteries of the Kabbalists and as Grantham truly says, we lose ourselves in those mists of the past usually known as prehistoric times.

Yet do we lose ourselves? or is it that, freed from the persuasive power of material events and things, we are at liberty to indulge the mind in the contemplation of the fundamental law, the commandment of love; which I would rephrase and call the will to do :

I would suggest then that away back long before the time of the mythologies, as I have pointed out in my pamphlet, the science of symbolism reigned and was understood. The Most Ancient Peoples delighted to make representations of the things they learned about the Logos or Wisdom that they might be always reminded of those mysteries. These things represented principles, so you had the law of cause and effect or symbolism in its beginnings. Unfortunately the key has been lost and you and I are looking for it to find again the genuine secrets of a M.M.; our object being, as the Dutch Masons say, "To perfect the individual and guide mankind towards better and more harmonic development."

It was from that Logos or Wisdom that the Spirit of Masonry sprang and thence the slogan, "A system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbol." It was the study of these allegories that gave rise to the words of warning of the I.G. when he declared, "There is an alarm!" and the Master replied, "Who dares interrupt our august

mysteries ?"

According to some of the old MSS there is on record at least one instance where the rules of the Lodge made it a duty after the business was over to spend an hour in the contemplation of the mysteries. This too was the custom in the far off days among our, "Holy Ancestors, the Atoning Priests," who must have been the Priests of Israel, of whom the Rabbis of the Middle Ages were the descendants. This contemplation of the Logos or Wisdom was no other than that which the ritual of today tries in its very small way to present to the brethren. This we are enjoined to do that we may, "make progress in the science." I can assure the brethren that this study of symbolism is not so very difficult and I commend it to your serious consideration.

It is this soul of Masonry that the Mark Degree strives to make our goal. It suggests we should mark well His holy commandments that we may glorify Him in all our work. That wherever stationed or employed, He is with His workmen, so that when called off we may be found worthy. But deeper things than these can be found with the assistance of symbolism as I suggested in the case of the working tools. In the light of these things we can realise the meaning of what Frederick the Great said, "Better members of society, more virtuous and charitable," for as Grantham reminds us, "If this inner meaning is not accepted, nothing remains but an empty shell." This is the true nature and these are the true

principles of the Mark Degree, and if we will follow them, then
by patient continuance in well doing, we shall be built up as
living stones into a spiritual house, meet for His habitation.

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