

2014/12/127

KIPLING AND THE CRAFT

Joseph Rudyard Kipling - Born Bombay December 1865
Rudyard - The name of the place where his Parents first met.

We are attempting this evening in the brief time available to show some of the many and various ways in which he expresses his ideas about the CRAFT.

Often Masonic references in his verse and prose are bold and clear without any particular relevance to the story. Such allusions to the CRAFT often seem to have slipped in involuntarily as though Kipling could find no better way of expressing himself, even though he must have known that their full significance might only have been known to a tiny fraction of his readers.

The poem *The Palace* written in 1903 is purely Masonic in character, but it contains an element of mysticism and is, for that reason, open to wide interpretation. Its principal theme is, perhaps, the lesson that even in decay a craftsman's work, done to the best of his ability, will hold a message of faith and encouragement to unborn generations - 'After me cometh a Builder. Tell him, I too have known'.

The Palace

When I was a King and a Mason - a Master proven and skilled -
I cleared me ground for a palace such as a King should build.
I decreed and dug down to my levels. Presently, under the
silt,
I came on the wreck of a palace such as a King had built.

There was no worth in the fashion - there was no wit in the
plan -
Hither and thither, aimless, the ruined footings ran -
Masonry, brute, mishandled, but carven on every stone:
'After me cometh a Builder. Tell him, I too have known'...

... When I was a King and a Mason - in the open noon of my
pride,
They sent me a Word from the Darkness - They whispered and
called me aside.
They said - 'The end is forbidden. They said - 'Thy use is
fulfilled,
And thy palace shall stand as that of others - the spoil of a
King who shall build.'

In April 1886, aged 20 years and 3 months, Kipling entered
the Craft. Kipling was proposed for initiation into Lodge
Hope and Perseverance, No 762 (EC), by a military friend, Col
Oswald Menzies, at that time President of the Punjab Dist Bd
of General Purposes; he was seconded by another member of the
Lodge, Bro W. Brown.

In his little autobiography, *Something of Myself*, written
towards the end of his life, he gives his own modest account
of his admission.

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In '85 I was made a Freemason by dispensation (Lodge Hope and Perseverance 782 E.C.) being under age, because the Lodge hoped for a good secretary. They did not get him, but I helped, and got the Father to advise, in decorating the bare walls of the Masonic Hall with hangings after the prescription of Solomon's Temple.

Here I met Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, members of the Araya and Brahma Samja, and a Jew Tyler, who was priest and butcher to his little community in the city. So yet another world opened to me which I needed.

The Minutes recording his raising are actually entered in the Minute Book in Kipling's own handwriting, he having acted as Secretary to the meeting at which he was raised - perhaps a unique position.

Entered in April 1886; Passed in May; Raised in December, the Lodge having been closed in the interim period. It is perhaps typical of Kipling that within a few months of his Raising he gave a lecture in his Mother Lodge on the 'Origin of the Craft First Degree', and four months later he lectured again on 'Popular Views on Freemasonry'.

Of his love for Freemasonry there can be no doubt. Yet it is strange that he left practically no personal records of his Lodges, or of his friendships in the Craft.

It is certain that the ability of Europeans and Asiatics to meet 'on the Level' in the Lodge Room, without distinction of class or colour, race or creed, had made a very deep impression on Kipling, as witness his poem *The Mother Lodge*, which was founded on that theme. Perhaps the best known and best loved of Kipling's Masonic poems which he wrote in 1896 in a single morning. The poem is no mere catalogue of the men of different Asiatic races who sat side-by-side in Lodge. Kipling shows the unique atmosphere of the Lodge when he says that each man could talk of the God he knew best in an environment of brotherhood and understanding. It is the picture of an Indian Lodge of Kipling's day. It is good to know that the characteristics that he admired so much have remained to this day.

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Many of Kipling's poems and prose first appeared in newspapers and were then gathered into book titles.

In contrast to the direct allusions, relevant or not, the most difficult items of all to trace are tricks of phrasing - the odd word or two which have their origins or parallels in Masonic ideas and lines of thought - although the words themselves do not belong to any specific Ritual or Lodge procedure.

An early poem which used Masonic phrases to express Kipling's ideas on a non-Masonic subject was 'The Widow at Windsor'. It describes the soldier's views of the might and power of Queen Victoria, but in none-too-respectful language. Yet, to the trooper, the British Empire is 'the Lodge' that stretches from the Tropics to the Pole:

The Widow at Windsor

Hands off o' the sons o' the Widow
Hands off o' the goods in 'er shop,
For the Kings must come down an' the Emperors frown
When the Widow at Windsor says 'Stop',
(Poor beggars! - we're sent to say 'Stop!')

Then 'ere's to the Lodge o' the Widow
From the Pole to the Tropics it runs -
To the Lodge that we file with the rank an' the file.
An' open in fore with the guns.
(Poor beggars! - it's always they guns!)

The poem ends with a play on the Tyler's Toast:

Then 'ere's to the sons o' the Widow,
Where'er, 'ow'er they roam.
'Ere's all they desire, an' if they require
A speedy return to their 'ome.
(Poor beggars! - they'll never see 'ome!)

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By far the best tale that Kipling ever told - from a Mason's view - is *In the Interests of the Brethren* (Published in *Debits and Credits* in 1926).

The story is set in London, towards the end of World War 1. Burges is one of a small group of Brethren, leaders in a Lodge of Instruction (attached to Lodge Faith and Works, No 5837) which, because London is the hub of the war-time world, has now opened its doors on its regular evening and for two afternoon sessions each week, the latter mainly for the benefit of the maimed and wounded brethren in the nearby hospitals.

The fame of this Lodge of Instruction - in a converted garage - has spread, so that it has become a wayside halt for soldiers and seamen passing through London - and for any who can 'prove themselves'.

The narrator arranges to accompany Burges.

'The examination of Visiting Brethren is conducted with charity: most of them have no 'papers', and some lack arms or hands, or even the ability to speak coherently. The officers for the ceremony are chosen from amongst the visitors and they are encouraged to 'work' without correction or interference. Later, a team of 'regulars' demonstrate the same work while the guests relax.'

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A simple banquet follows each evening meeting, provided by the leaders, and no visitor is allowed to pay. The table-talk gives Kipling the opportunity to point the moral and to show what Freemasonry could really mean to men under stress - for this is no ordinary Lodge of Instruction, but an ideal; it is an appeal to the Craft to awaken to its responsibilities. In Kipling's own words:

'A man's Lodge means more to him than people imagine... When I think of the possibilities of the Craft at this juncture, I wonder... There ought to be a dozen - twenty - other Lodges in London every night: conferring degrees too, as well as instruction. Why shouldn't the young men join? They practise what we're always preaching... We must all do what we can. What's the use of old Masons if they can't give a little help along their own lines?'

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The poem, Banquet Night, is simply a colourful piece of Masonic high spirits, urging the Brethren to 'Forget these things', ie, the troubles of the world outside, and rejoice in fraternal fellowship.

Banquet Night

'Once in so often', King Solomen said,
Watching his quarrymen drill the stone,
'We will club our garlic and wine and bread
And banquet together beneath my Throne.
And all the Brethren shall come to that mess
As Fellow-Craftsmen - no more and no less.

'Send a swift shallop to Hiram of Tyre,
Felling and floating our beautiful trees,
Say that the Brethren and I desire
Talk with our Brethren who use the seas.
And we shall be happy to meet them at mess
As Fellow-Craftsmen - no more and no less.

'Carry this mesage to Hiram Abif -
Excellent Master of Forge and mine:
I and the Brethren would like it if
He and the Brethren will come to dine
(Garments from Bozrah or Morning Dress)
As Fellow-Craftsmen - no more and no less.

....The Quarries are hotter than Hiram's forge,
No one is safe from the dog-whip's reach.
It's mostly snowing up Lebanon gorge,
And it's always blowing off Joppa beach;
But once in so often, the messenger brings
Solomon's mandate: Forget these things!
Brothers to Beggars and Fellow to Kings,
Companion of Princes - forget these things!
Fellow-Craftsmen, forget these things!

Kipling and the Craft

A Masonic poem, beautiful in its theme as in its clear simplicity, is My New-Cut Ashlar. It is the prayer of a craftsman who hopes that his work may be found worthy in the eyes of the Great Overseer.

MY NEW-CUT ASHLAR

My new-cut ashlar takes the light
Where crimson-blank the windows flare.
By my own work before the night,
Great Overseer, I make my prayer.

If there be good in that I wrought,
Thy Hand compelled it, Master, Thine -
Where I have failed to meet Thy Thought
I know, through Thee, the blame was mine.

... One stone the more swings into place
In that dread Temple of Thy worth.
It is enough that, through Thy Grace,
I saw nought common on Thy Earth.

Take not that vision from my ken -
Or whatsoe'er may spoil or speed.
Help me to need no aid from men
That I may help such men as need!

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The Mother Lodge

There was Rundle, Station Master,
An' Beazeley of the Rail,
An' Ackman, Commissariat, An' Donkin' o' the Jail;
An' Blake, Conductor-Sergeant,
Our Master twice was 'e,
With 'im that kept the Europe-shop,
Old Framjee Eduljee.

Outside - Sergeant! Sir! Salute! Salaam!
Inside - Brother, an' it dosen't do no 'arm.
We met upon the Level an' we parted on the Square,
An' I was Junior Deacon in my Mother-Lodge out there!

We'd Bola Nath, Accountant,
An' Saul the Aden Jew,
An' Din Mohammed, draughtsman
Of the Survey Office, too:
There was Babu Chuckerbutty,
An' Amire Singh the Sikh
An' Castro from the fittin'-sheds
The Roman Catholick!

Outside - Sergeant! Sir! Salute! Salaam!
Inside - Brother, an' it dosen't do no 'arm.
We met upon the Level an' we parted on the Square,
An' I was Junior Deacon in my Mother-Lodge out there!

We 'adn't good regalia
An' our Lodge was old an' bare,
But we knew the Ancient Landmarks,
An' we kep' 'em to a hair;
An' lookin' on it backwards
It often strikes me thus,
There air't such things as infidels,
Excep', per'aps, it's us.

Outside - Sergeant! Sir! Salute! Salaam!
Inside - Brother, an' it dosen't do no 'arm.
We met upon the Level an' we parted on the Square,
An' I was Junior Deacon in my Mother-Lodge out there!

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For monthly, after Labour,
We'd all sit down and smoke
(We dursn't give no banquetts,
Lest a Brother's caste were broke),
An' man on man got talkin'
Religion an' the rest,
An' every man comparin'
Of God 'e knew the best.
Outside - Sergeant! Sir! Salute! Salaam!
Inside - Brother, an' it dosen't do no 'arm.
We met upon the Level an' we parted on the Square,
An' I was Junior Deacon in my Mother-Lodge out there!

...Full oft on Guv'ment service
This rovin' foot 'ath pressed,
An' bore fraternal greetin's
To the Lodges east an' west,
Accordin' as commanded
from Kohat to Singapore,
But I wish that I might see them
In my Mother-Lodge once more!

Kipling and the Craft

In January 1936, Kipling replied to an invitation from the Secretary of the Authors' Lodge:

Bateman's
Burwash, Sussex
January 7, 1936

Dear Brother Spalding,
Thank you very much for the Lodge invitation for the 15th, but I'm sorry to say that each year I pass from the labour of fighting the English climate to the refreshment, more or less, of the South of France, and by the 15th. I ought to be there in whatever sunshine this mad world has to offer. Please convey my regrets to the Brethren, and
Believe me,

Fraternally yours,
(Signed) RUDYARD KIPLING,

Early in January 1936, Kipling was spending a few days at Brown's Hotel in London, prior to a projected trip to Cannes. Rudyard suffered a violent haemorrhage; he lingered a few days and died on 18 January 1936, soon after his 70th birthday.

He lies buried in Poe's corner at Westminster Abbey.

In the reading of these few poems it is quite impossible to do justice to the Masonic character of a man who had led such a full, busy and successful life. The constant interruptions in his career, his necessary mobility as a journalist, and his travels, his early marriage and his subsequent wanderings, all contributed towards his inability to make 'progress' in the Craft. Yet his zeal for Freemasonry was proclaimed in his writings.

He was a 'practical' Mason, keenly aware of the practical usefulness of the Craft in bringing men together in service and good deeds; yet in some of his poems, he showed a genuine awareness of the spiritual aspects of the Craft.

Kipling and the Craft

Worshipful Master; Right Worshipful Provincial Grand master:
Brother Wardens and Brethren;

We trust we have given a little insight into -

KIPLING AND THE CRAFT

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