

VICTORIA LODGE OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

ALBERT PIKE

By

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(The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the Author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Victoria Lodge of Education and Research.)

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Albert Pike in 1870 _ "Every sanctuary in Freemasonry is to me as a home which I am glad to enter and reluctant to leave. I am especially glad to be here, because I find unbroken union and a generous fraternity among yourselves. Here, as in other sanctuaries of Masonry, I am sure I shall find Brethren teaching Brethren to think better instead of worse of each other: to look for the good that is in each; to regard faults with compassion instead of dislike, and look long and carefully for something to regard and love in everyone, and for faults - only to forgive them, and excuse them as defects and failings inseparable from our feeble, and erring, and perverse human nature."

To hear these words of Pike's, is to have defined in his inimitable style, the real basics of Masonry - a summation of the great religions of the ages. Above all, Pike was a humanist, signifying a release from spiritual and temporal despotism, a protest against medieval theology, which taught that all human action and aspirations were sinful. It counts man as a man, as a rare product of nature , the most precious product of evolution. Probably no man in the United States - or for that matter - in our world, has contributed more than Pike to the Masonic Order, and when we consider his many faceted life, it becomes even more noteworthy. It encompassed the field of law and economics. He was a poet of note, a soldier and of course a great philosopher. The magnitude of his attainments are even more impressive when we recall that he was principally self-taught.

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with the Pikes, however, as three of their children died in infancy, a son was drow

He was born in Boston on the 29th of December 1809 to Benjamin and Sarah Pike, who moved to Newburyport in 1814 where young Pike received his elementary education in the public schools, and his secondary grades in a private academy in Farmingham. He entered Harvard as a freshman, teaching school at Gloucester at the same time to pay his tuition. Following this period, he left school for a year teaching, and was readmitted to Harvard as a Junior. They required him to pay two year's tuition but because of his lack of funds, was forced to drop these pursuits and miss a collegiate education.

He mastered several languages, among which were Greek, French and Spanish, but his favourite was Latin, for as he said; "Without a knowledge of it, a man cannot be considered educated."

He left Newburyport in 1831, traveling west through Tennessee, Kentucky,

the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers, and on to Santa Fe by wagon-train. As he approached the Rocky Mountains he said:

"It is particularly sublime, as you draw nigh to the Rocky Mountains, and see them shoot up in the west, with their lofty tops looking like white clouds resting on their summits, nothing ever equaled the intense feeling of delight with which I first saw the eternal mountains marking the western edge of the desert."

He became deeply interested in the Indians of this area of New Mexico, which resulted in a glossary of Indian languages and numerous poems. In his memoirs, he relates many experiences with the Osages, Comanches, Choctaws and others. This with the Indian lasted throughout his life, for he later fought the legal battle of the Choctaw all the way to the Supreme Court. He wrote of the Indian in his later years that, "To regard the Indian as a creature radically different from a white man is a great mistake. They are a people with the same nature and affection as ourselves and controlled by the same motives and springs of action. Nor are they faithless and treacherous people. nor by nature jealous and suspicious, but trusting, frank and loyal."

He traveled to Arkansas quite by accident, having become lost on his intended route to Louisiana.. Again he taught for a period in Northern Arkansas, which he left for Little Rock, where he purchased the local paper, publishing it for about 2½ years. On October 10, 1834 he married Mary Hamilton, a union that lasted for nearly 40 years. Their house became the centre of social activities of Little Rock, and there he spent the "happiest years of his life." Fate did not deal kindly ned at 14, another was killed in the Civil War, a daughter died at 27. It was such experiences as these, which occasioned his exquisite poem, "Life is a count of losses every year."

During the Mexican War, he commanded a cavalry squadron, and when the regimental commander was killed, Pike succeeded to the command and was twice cited for his gallantry and good judgment.

In 1885 after the war as a lawyer he advocated the construction of a railroad to the Pacific with terminus at San Francisco, which was to come true some 14 years later It was during these years that a friend wrote of Pike: "I met him at a dinner party given in his honour by a well-known citizen of New Orleans. When introduced to Pike, I was struck with admiration of his noble and commanding appearance, and his strong, intelligent and pleasant countenance. His manner was affable and courteous, and after dinner he was requested to give some accounts of the country through which he had been travelling in the far west. He narrated many incidents of his long journey, but in a very quiet and modest manner, speaking more of the acts and doings of his companions than of himself, and won thereby the admiration of all present , and certainly made a deep and lasting impression on me."

Although he was an opponent of slavery, Pike did not believe its immediate abolition worth disrupting the Union. He commented, "The Negro race is advancing towards freedom, and climbing up in the scale of humanity, as England's serfs and France's peasants did, as the gypsy and Russian serf are doing, and the lower classes of Hindustan - but by a slower and more gradual progress., so it is that

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God brings about all great and beneficial results. The ascent from brutality and barbarism to civilization, from servitude to freedom, is slow and it is hardly perceptible in a single generation. Nature works slowly to produce . . .

.the Negro will be free in God's good time: and the coming of that time we cannot hasten."

He looked with horror on the prospect of the dissolution of the Union, while at the same time he knew that it could not be helped. He consented to the cessation of Arkansas only as a last resort, when she was compelled to decide whether her sons would fight for or against the southern sister states. He proposed a confederacy of secessionist states, powerful enough to cause the north to negotiate a settlement, with a treaty of amity and reciprocity without bloodshed, to keep open the door for complete reconciliation. Failing in this, he called for wisdom and patriotism, to establish a southern nation dedicated to freedom and constitutional government. Even so, he never lost his love for the Union and looked upon the Civil War with the profoundest sorrow and gloomiest apprehension. He met with the usual fate of the peacemaker, who intervening between extremists, satisfies neither, and earns the suspicion and enmity of both. The simple fact was that Pike was far ahead of his time, having traveled extensively in all parts of the country, and had the breadth of vision that made him one of the most cosmopolitan of his day.

He entered the service of the Confederacy in a principally civil capacity as Commissioner of Indian Tribes, but was forbidden to incur any financial obligations to the Indians, while forming all the tribes into a single territorial government without State organization or independence. He was faced with the prospect that without tribal treaties, they would all be allied against the South by the North within 90 days. He therefore disregarded his instructions from the Confederate Congress, and negotiated treaties with some eleven Indian Nations, which were later ratified by the South but were never carried out. He resigned his Indian Commission to accept the rank of Brigadier General to command in the Indian country. This was his most controversial time, as there were many charges and counter charges concerning brutalities of Indian forces under his command which resulted in his resignation. For the last 2½ years of the war he was suspected of disloyalty to the South because of his non-combatant status. He was, however, given a complete pardon for his part in support of the Southern cause, by President Johnson in April 1866. He moved to Washington from Memphis in the Fall of 1868, where the bitterness engendered by the war gradually faded away, and he found a congenial atmosphere to live out his life.

Throughout Pike's life, poetry was one of the principal means of expression, and even in his greatest philosophical works we can see blank verse in his prose writings, such as:

"The grand objects of nature
perpetually constrain men
to think of their author..
"The Alps are the great altar of Europe;
The nocturnal sky has been
To mankind the dome of a temple,
Starred all over with admonitions
To reverence, trust and love."

He never sought commercial gain from any of his writings, as he said that writing had always been to him a communing with his own soul, and the student of Pike finds this permeating his thoughts.

Pike received his three Masonic Degrees in Western Star Lodge No. 1, in Little Rock, Ark. in 1850, and in 1852 was a charter member of Magnolia Lodge No. 60, becoming its Master

in 1854 and 1855. He said of programs of Masonic study:

"Lodges must engage in works of practical usefulness -- something must be done at the meetings, more than repeating formula by rote, and going over and over the work of conferring degrees; or intellectual men will soon be wearied out and cease to attend. Lectures upon scientific and literary subjects, illustrating the history and philosophy of Masonry -- elucidations of the moral lessons of the ritual and the old Charges, and other things of the kind, would soon make the lodge meetings interesting."

During the month of November 1850 he received the Royal Arch Degree, and became Grand High Priest in 1853 and 1854. He received the Council and Commandery Degrees in Washington in 1852, as there were no bodies then existing in Arkansas to confer them. Pike himself said, "I never heard of the Scottish Rite until 1853." But on March 20, Albert G. Mackey communicated to him the 4th through the 32nd Degrees. A great friendship sprang up between these two eminent Masonic Scholars, which despite their differences during the Civil War, lasted until their deaths. On April 25, 1857 he received the 33° from the Supreme Council, and was elected Grand Commander January 12., 1858. Pike soon discovered that the Supreme Council had no books nor records, had a Treasurer General but no money, and so he set out to reorganize its efforts. Thirty-two years later he recalled that a Senator had queried him as to why he had not entered politics rather than to have devoted his life to masonry. His reply was: "The country prospers in spite of its statesmen and legislation; and it seems that in Freemasonry I am doing more good among men than you are."

In 1868, he reported that, "After 10 years, his long labor for the Scottish Rite is completed." He was, of course, referring to his monumental task of the rewriting of the rituals from the 4th through the 32nd Degrees. He had combined them all into one harmonious system, he had removed the absurdities and platitudes that had crept into the texts and simplified the lofty titles formerly used. He had not however, removed any of the signs or words, and had retained the obligations nearly intact. These were printed in 1864, and were the work of one man. It was also during the period of his ritual revision, that he wrote the book, "Morals and Dogma" in which he notes that he was equally author and compiler, having extracted about half of its contents from the works of the best philosophers, writers and eloquent thinkers of the ages. His energetic leadership as Grand Commander of the Southern Jurisdiction resulted in a rite that is a "Teacher of great truths, inspired by an upright and enlightened reason, a firm and constant wisdom, and an affectionate and liberal philanthropy."

Pike served as Grand Commander from 1858 to 1891 with great distinction, and it is difficult to imagine anyone else approaching the magnitude of his service. Despite his long preoccupation with the Scottish Rite, he maintained his deep concern and affection for the blue lodge until his death April 2, 1891. One of his simplest statements was, "I am a Mason, and nothing concerning Masonry is uninteresting to me."

Perhaps his greatest epitaph was expressed by the learned Masonic scholar, Joseph Fort Newton:

"All this beauty and promise, be it noted, Pike saw in the old Blue Lodge

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and to the end of his life the Blue Lodge was the chief object of his solicitude and hope. He did not want to see Masonry lose its ancient prestige and become a mere social and faintly beneficial collection of clubs, and more than any other man, he has saved it from such apostasy.
