

New Cut Trails

OLD TILER, I have made up my mind that there is a fundamentalism and a modernism in Masonry, as well as in the church. And I am a Masonic fundamentalist," began the New Brother.

"That's a fine mouthful of an expression," commented the Old Tiler. " 'Masonic fundamentalist.' If I just knew what it meant, now, I'd go spring it on someone."

"Don't make fun. This is serious!" protested the New Brother.

"Then be serious and tell me what kind of an animal, if any, a Masonic fundamentalist is," begged the Old Tiler.

"Why, he is one who finds the ritual all-sufficient as a source of Masonic light; one who doesn't hold with the higher criticism of Masonic documents and the old charges and constitutions; one who believes in the exact truth of the Masonic legends; one who can bridge the gap between written history since Grand Lodges and the time of King Solomon without a mental effort; in other words, one who has faith without proof in the reality of the continuance of Masonry as a system of morality and philosophy right down from Solomon's time to now!"

"Guess I can't use the expression after all," answered the Old Tiler. "Too much of a mouthful."

"Don't you agree that a Masonic fundamentalist is the happier and better Mason than the modernist Mason?"

"You ask me if I think the ignorant Mason is happier than the educated one!" returned the Old Tiler, vigorously.

"If a cow is happier than a philosopher, I'll agree. But what is happiness? If it makes you happy not to use your mind, to believe legends and fairy tales, I suppose Masonic fundamentalism is your proper meat. I am not built that way. I have found the real story of Freemasonry, as it has been patiently unfolded from the mists of the dim past by earnest students, a great deal more fascinating than the legendary history. I have loved the legends more as I have been able to distinguish between legend and fact. Santa Claus and Hans Andersen's fairies are much more real to me now than they were when I was a little boy.

"Instead of being a Masonic fundamentalist, I like to think of myself as a Masonic adventurer. And that reminds me of something I cut out of a magazine; maybe you'd like to read it." The Old Tiler produced a well-worn pocketbook, from which he extracted a clipping. "Listen to this and see if it doesn't fit-almost. - He read softly Marie LeNar's beautiful verse,

"The Adventurer."

"God, in the name of Jesus' blood and tears,
Loose us from slavish bondage to dead years,
To dogmas that, encrusted in the mould
Of age, no virtue have, save to be old.
Lo! A new era has been ushered in.
Lo! now the new wine bursts the ancient skin.
Then gird us, Lord, dispel our cowards' fears,
Give us the daring hearts of pioneers.
What though in quest of truth we sometimes stray?
Better to seek fresh morsels day by day
Than feed, like swine, on husks before us thrown
From which the inward nourishment has gone.
Better to stray-and struggle back again
If we too far surpass our mortal ken
Old paths for sheep, but new-cut trails for men!"

"Old paths for sheep, but new-cut trails for men," repeated the New Brother, softly, as the Old Tiler finished.

"That's rather fine, isn't it?"

"It seems fine to me, whether we speak of religion, or Masonry, or science, or knowledge, or politics, or government. That which is good and also old, is not good because it is old, but old because it is good. If it isn't good in itself, we ought to toss it overboard, regardless of its age. To persecute those who think differently from constituted authority is an old doctrine. It was old when the Inquisition made it new. But it wasn't good, was it, just because it was old? Slavish obedience to a king, regardless of right and justice, was an old idea when the Magna Carta was signed; it was older when the Liberty Bell first rang in this country, but it wasn't good just because it was old.

"Brotherly love was known long before King Solomon; it is as good today as it was then, but not because of its age, but because of its goodness.

"'Old paths for sheep.' I am no sheep! As best I can, I keep my feet upon new-cut trails. But I hold fast to the staff of the Ancient Landmarks, and all that is good in our order; I try to cast overboard the superstition and the slavish adherence to doctrine. I do not, for instance, believe that certain consequences which we agree shall follow failure to keep our obligations are to be taken literally. If William Morgan was slain by Freemasonry in 1826 (which he was not!) I don't believe it was right, even though it was deserved. Neither did the Freemasons of that age believe it was right. But a Masonic fundamentalist must take such things literally. I do not believe that Solomon established a Grand Lodge, and met, as Grand Master, with two other Hiram's, also Grand Masters. Yet I believe in the essential truths contained in the Solomon legend, and in the essential truth and beauty of the Hiram's legend.

"What difference does it make whether George Washington did, or did not, cut down a cherry tree, and refuse to tell a lie about it? Washington is an ideal, an embodiment of truth. If that ideal can be taught to children with a story, then the story is true, whether it ever happened or not. If men are taught fidelity and loyalty and bravery and honor and honesty by the Hiram legend, it is true, whether it ever happened or not. Santa Claus is true, whether the children's saint be an actual fat old man living in a toyshop at the North Pole, or just happiness in men's hearts.

"To my mind the more of the truth we know, the more we value the legends. Therefore, I try to be a student of the real history of Masonry, that I may love its stories, its myths and its symbols the more. No sheep, the new-cut trail is under my feet and will be, while these old eyes can follow it-." The Old Tiler's voice trailed off into silence.

"I'm following after, if you'll give me a hand," answered the New Brother, gently. "
'New-cut trails for men!'"