

What Is Masonry?

I've been a Mason six months now and I ought to know something about Masonry. But there are more secrets in the fraternity I don't know than those I have been told!"

The New Brother was puzzled. The Old Tiler laid down his sword, picked up a half-smoked cigar and lit it, and settled back in his chair.

"Get it out of your system," he invited.

"Is Masonry a religion," continued the New Brother, "or a system of philosophy, or a childish getting together of men who like to play politics and wear titles? I have heard it called all three. Sometimes I think it's one and sometimes the other. What do you think?"

"It isn't a childish getting together for the love of titles and honors," answered the Old Tiler. "Men would soon' invent a much better organization for the satisfaction of such purposes. In fact, he has invented better ones. Men who want to play politics and be called the Grand High Cockalorum of the Exalted Central Chamber of the Secret Sanctorum can join these. If Masonry were nothing but play, it wouldn't live, and living, grow.

"Masonry isn't a religion. A religion, as I see it, is a belief in a deity and a means of expressing worship. Masonry recognizes Deity, and proceeds only after asking divine guidance. But it does not specify any particular deity. You can worship any God You Please and be a Mason. That is not true of any religion. If you are a Buddhist, you worship Buddha. If a Christian, Christ is your Deity. If you are a Mohammedan you are a worshipper of Allah. In Masonry you will find Christian, Jew, Mohammedan and Buddhist side by side.

"Masonry has been called a system of philosophy, but that is a confining definition. I don't think Masonry has ever been truly defined."

"Or God," put in the New Brother.

"Exactly. A witty Frenchman, asked if he believed in God, replied, 'Before I answer, you must tell me your definition of God. And when you tell me, I will answer you, no, because a God defined is a God limited, and a limited God is no God.' Masonry is something like that; it is brotherhood, unlimited, and when you limit it by defining it you make it something it isn't."

"Deep stuff I" commented the New Brother.

"Masonry is 'deep stuff,'" answered the Old Tiler. "It's so deep no man has ever found the bottom. Perhaps that is its greatest charm; you can go as far as you like and still not see the limit. The fascination of astronomy is the limitlessness of the field. No telescope has seen to the edge of the universe. The fascination of Masonry is that it has no limits.

The human heart has no limit in depth and that which appeals most to the human heart cannot have a limit."

"But that makes it so hard to understand!" sighed the New Brother.

"Isn't it the better for being difficult of comprehension?" asked the Old Tiler. "A few days ago I heard an eminent divine and Mason make an inspiring talk. I hear a lot of talks; nine-tenths are empty words with a pale tallow-dip gleam of a faint idea somewhere in them. So when a real talker lets the full radiance of a whole idea shine on an audience, he is something to be remembered. This speaker quoted a wonderful poem, by William Herbert Carruth. I asked him to send it to me, and he did; please note, this busy man, president of a university, and with a thousand things to do, didn't forget the request of a brother he never saw before!"

The Old Tiler put his hand in his pocket and took out a much-thumbed piece of paper. "Listen, you," he said, "'till I read you just one verse of it:

'A picket frozen on duty;
A mother, starved for her brood;
Socrates' drinking the hemlock,
And Jesus on the rood;
And millions who, humble and nameless,
The straight hard pathway plod;
Some call it consecration
And others call it God.'

The New Brother said nothing, held silent by the beauty of the lines.

"I am no poet," continued the Old Tiler, "and I know this isn't very fitting, but I wrote something to go with those verses, just to read to brothers like you." Shyly the Old Tiler continued:

"Many men, banded together
Standing where Hiram stood;
Hand to back of the falling,
Helping in brotherhood.
Wise man, doctor, lawyer,
Poor man, man of the hod,
Many call it Masonry
And others call it God."

"I don't think it makes much difference what we call it, do you?" asked the New Brother.