

Book Of Constitutions Guarded By The Tiler's Sword

By Unknown

Let me introduce the speaker of the evening, although, as presiding officers so often say, he hardly needs an introduction. I believe that most Masons know him well and, after I describe him, you will easily recognize him. He is the Tiler of his Lodge and a very interesting man to meet. You will find it worth while cultivating his acquaintance.

I have met him wherever I have been privileged to visit lodge. He is a man of uncertain age. He is old in wisdom, in his knowledge of Masonic Lore, and in his understanding of human nature. He is young with that spirit of eternal youth that comes with fulfillment of the sweet law of Brotherhood. He knows all the Brethren intimately and never misses a meeting of his lodge. He has seen young men hesitatingly enter the preparation room for the first time; he has seen them passed and raised, watched their enthusiastic progress through the stations, served under them as they sat in the Oriental Chair, and walked with drawn sword at the head of the procession as they were carried to their last resting place.

His name is legion but I prefer to call him Peters, because everybody calls him by his first name; and if your tank is working tonight, you will recognize the appropriateness of calling him Peter.

He does not get into the lodge room very often and would be particularly embarrassed if called upon to make a speech. I have seen him come into the room on large meeting nights to help the deacons purge the lodge. He will cast his eyes carelessly over the crowd and then confidently couch for every man in the room. I have sometimes wondered whether he possesses uncanny wisdom or whether he is simply faking.

But let us go out into his little room that is furnished with a cast-off table and some chairs that were used in the lodge room before it was remodeled; let us light the cigar, cigarette or pipe that Masonic custom denies us in the lodge, tilt our chairs back against the wall, lay our heads against that greasy spot left by many heads that have rested there before ours, and listen to this Masonic Philosopher.

"I have often wondered," says Peter, "about these Masonic Symbols. Generally when you fellows are in there watching the work I am out here by myself, and so you see I have lots of time to think. Sometimes I am puzzled by what the Ritual says in its explanation of these symbols. Take for instance, those nine emblems of the Third Degree. I suppose most of you fellows have forgotten all about them because you generally come streaming out here and throw your aprons in a pile for me to straighten out about the time the Master starts on his lecture. The only time you stay is when the Master tells you there is going to be coffee and sandwiches after the work, and then you hang around during the lecture.

"There is one of those emblems that has given me more trouble than anything else in Masonry; it is the one in which you see a book lying on a velvet pillow with a sword over the top. The Masters tells you that it is the Book of Constitutions Guarded by the Tiler's Sword, and that it reminds us to be ever watchful and guarded in our thoughts, words, and actions, particularly when before the enemies of Masonry, ever bearing in mind those truly Masonic virtues,; silence and circumspection. Now, that never seemed just right to me.

"Those old boys who gave us this Ritual had pretty good ideas about symbolism, and the things they used as symbols generally meant just exactly what they told you about them. It is funny how much meaning they could get out of such things as a trowel, a square or a level. True symbolism, you know, isn't forced. It just comes naturally. The moment you hear the explanation, you say, 'Of Course! Why didn't I think of that before?' That is why I could never see what there was about that book and sword to teach us to be watchful and guarded in our thoughts, words and actions. "You know the Chinese with their three monkeys, one with his hands over his ears, the other with his hands over his eyes, and the third with his hands over his mouth made a much better symbol of being watchful and guarded than our book and sword, and the same thing holds true in regard to silence and circumspection. If that is what we want to teach, we had better get rid of that book and sword and throw a picture of the three wise monkeys on the screen.

"Some time ago I read a book written by a great man who had spent his life studying Masonry. One thing that makes me want to study Masonry is that so many great men have found it worthy of such deep study. This writer seemed to have the idea that Masonry didn't always say just exactly what it meant. He said something about the real truth of Masonry being hidden in the Ritual instead of being revealed by it; that you had to search out the real meaning of the Masonic Symbols for yourself. That always stuck by me. I was talking to one of the brethren about it and he agreed with this Masonic writer. This brother said we don't sell the secrets of Freemasonry; when a man pays for his degrees, we only sell him the tools and he must use them to dig out the secrets for himself. And so I dug away at the old book and sword trying to understand what it really meant until the other night when one of these Service association fellows came around and talked to us.

"He showed us how much the Masons had to do with the founding of this government. He told us how Paul Revere's ride was organized among Masons and how all the fellows that helped Paul Revere make that ride were his Brethren, while Paul Revere himself was Provincial Grand Master of Masons in Massachusetts. He told us of the Boston Tea Party, and how the little affair was arranged at the Old Green Dragon Tavern, which was nothing more or less than a Masonic Temple. He told us about John Hancock, Benjamin Franklin, Joseph Warren, Lafayette, and George Washington; and ever so many more of those early patriots who were all Masons, and how it was by working together as Masons that they carried out on the Revolutionary War, and then afterwards built this nation of ours. He told us about the constitution of the United States. You know the interesting thing about that is not that these men were Masons, many of our prominent citizens today are Masons, but that the same group of men who were leaders of our Fraternity were also leaders of the nation at that time. And then he told us how, because our Brethren had laid the foundation of this nation and because that foundation was in accord with Masonic principles, it was our duty to build the rest of the Temple to Liberty in America, and to watch over it and guard it with our very lives.

"So I got the thinking about that old Book and sword and it seemed to me that perhaps after all there was a real meaning behind it that was concealed rather than revealed in the Ritual, as that Masonic writer that I told you about said; and it seemed to me that Book of Constitutions, instead of being a symbol of silence and circumspection, was a symbol of constitutional government such as we have in this country. Our Book of Constitutions, you know, is our Masonic fundamental law, just as the Constitution of the United States is the fundamental law of our nation. So you see how naturally it becomes the symbol of constitutional government.

"That Sword over the Book is this little old sword lying here on the table beside me. You know, this sword isn't any good to hurt anybody with, but it is just a symbol by which Freemasonry protects itself against cowards and eavesdroppers. So it is just a symbol of Masonry on guard and, as the Book of Constitutions is a symbol of constitutional government, the Tiler's Sword is a symbol of Masonry on guard. Do you see what I'm getting at? I believe the Book of Constitutions Guarded by the Tiler's Sword teaches us that Masonry should always be the Guardian of Constitutional Government.

"I was telling another Brother about this the other night and he told me I was wrong because Masonry was older than the United States government and the symbol, he said, must be older than this country of ours. So I got to thinking about that too and it came to me that much of this speculative Masonry that we have today comes to us from England. Of course, I understand that Masonry as we know it has been gathered together from many countries. Some fellows say that we get it direct from the boys that worked on King Solomon's Temple but it may be that isn't quite right. Speculative Masonry, in its present form at least, did have its origin in England, and you know that a lot of the ideas about constitutional government that were accepted by us were first brought into practice back in England before the United States became a free country. And

so I thought it very likely that even back then in those days our English Brethren, just like our Revolutionary Brethren were fighting for constitutional government and maybe they had as much to do with getting it in England as George Washington, Paul Revere and the other boys had with getting it in this country.

"But I'm inclined to agree with Brother Mackey, who believed that our monitorial definition of this emblem is a modern one, and was introduced by Brother Webb. It does not appear in the first edition of Webb's Monitor, but I found it in the second edition, printed in 1802. Mackey says, 'This interpretation of Webb is a very unsatisfactory one. The Book of Constitutions is the Symbol of constituted law rather than of silence and circumspection, and when guarded by the Tiler's Sword it would seem properly to symbolize regard for and obedience to law, a prominent Masonic duty.'

"So, until somebody shows me that I am wrong, I am going to believe every time I see that book and sword on the screen that the book is the Constitution of the United States and the sword is Freemasonry on guard; and instead of teaching me to be watchful and guarded in all my thoughts, words and actions; it is going to teach me to be ever watchful and guarded against the enemies of my nation and its Constitution, so that when I get up into the Grand Lodge above those old boys up there that built this nation are going to meet me with the Lion's Paw, and vouch for me when the Supreme Grand Master of the Universe takes the Pass."

That is Peter's story of the Book of Constitutions Guarded by the Tiler's Sword. You may take it or leave it, but somehow or other I think he is right. At least, ever since I heard tell that story I have had a new thrill while listening to the Master explaining the nine Masonic Emblems in the Third Degree; and I say to myself, "Well, that is all right for the candidate. We can't give him all the light at once, because he would simply be blinded by its brilliance. But, for myself, I have been out in the anteroom with Peters using our working tools in a search for further Masonic light, and I know that sword and book mean that it is up to me to fight the enemies of constitutional government and to protect our Constitution from those seeking to destroy it. And with the help of the Great Architect of the Universe, and my nearly three million Brethren, I am going to do that little job!

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