

Mummies

By Unknown

Three thousand years ago King Tutank-Amen was gathered to his fathers, and hidden from sight – and, as it proved, from memory for one hundred and twenty generations.

Now his rocky tomb is opened, and his mummy is brought forth for investigation; to be x-rayed, to tell its extraordinary story to a race of people of which he and his court never dreamed. The gold ornaments of his elaborate sarcophagi are still bright and shining; the wonderful carvings of the decorations of his rocky sepulcher are still as graceful as when made; the multitude of objects with which the Royal body was surrounded to help it on its travels through the realms of the shades to the Egyptian heaven are, most of them, apparently in as perfect a condition as when they put aside.

But just what they mean, why they were placed there, what message they carried from the living to the dead, we have yet to discover. We will discover them. Patient scholars have untangled the meanings concealed in the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics; deductive reasoning will eliminate the impossible and then the improbable from the various theories advanced to account for all that seems strange and reasonless in this most elaborate laying away of the earthy tabernacle of him who once was Pharaoh in Egypt, and, as much without his intent as without his knowledge, we will turn one more page, read one more chapter in the wonderful and vivid story of a civilization which has vanished, a people which is no more.

It is not only curiosity which makes us try to read the riddle of the past, decipher the inscription on the mummy's case, understand the religion, the philosophy, the political faith and the daily life of men who lived and loved and died three thousand years ago. It is to help us understand the riddle of humanity as it is spread before our eyes today; it is to give us some added measure of comprehension of the great "why" of all life, that we try to learn what other men of other times have thought of the great problems of existence; the mystery of life; the mystery of the universe, the mystery of God.

The world has other mummies than those prepared by the hands of the Egyptian undertakers. Freemasonry has her mummies; the dead bodies of her philosophies and her teachings, embalmed in symbol and preserved in cryptic sign., For many years – years numbering perhaps in hundreds as many as have passed over the tomb of King Tut-amen – symbols and mysteries

which Freemasonry has preserved, have kept inviolate the secrets which our ancient brethren discovered. Our Freemasonry, in its organization, its political system and its ritual claims no such antiquity, but the essentials of this our Fraternity, do go back into ancient times as truths, as much without a beginning, as far as we know, as they seem to us necessary to be without an ending.

It is our business to read these ancient doctrines; to unwrap the mummies of Freemasonry, to decipher the cuneiform inscriptions which conceal the old, old truths, as new today as when they were first formulated by the Great Teller of All Truth.

Freemasonry today lays before our eyes mummies of an ancient religion, in every degree she sees conferred upon an initiate. In all our ceremonies of initiation we perform the Rite of Circumambulation. Most of us perform it as solemnly as we perform it ignorantly, knowing little, and too often, caring less, of its significance. It is truly a Masonic mummy. When loving hands unwind the wrappings, we find within this simple ceremony our kinship with the earliest men who worshipped a Higher Power, and learn that we have a direct kinship with the first of all religions Circumambulation; a walking around an Altar or Holy Spot; is an imitation. Early man worshipped the sun, which kept him warm, which defended him from wild beasts, which made his grain to grow and smiled benignly upon his life. When his God was angry, he hid his face; when he was grieved, he wept tears which were rain; when he was contented with his people, he shown full upon them, and traveled slowly, majestically from the east to the west by way of the south. His bit of fire on a rude altar of stones was early man's first attempt to bring his God close to him. His slow walk about that Altar, from east to west by way of the south, was his imitation of the course of his God through the heavens. All people, of all lands, in all religions, have walked about their place of Divine habitation, and always they, as did the first worshippers, travel from east to west by way of the south. Truly is circumambulation a mummy, concealing in its prosaic footsteps a truth of the heart which well repays study.

In the Fellowcraft Degree we pass between the Pillars which are emblematic of those which stood upon the porch of King Solomon's Temple. Modern scholars find this mummy which not all their skill has succeeded completely in unwrapping. But enough of the ancient body of truth has been discovered to make us marvel at the gentle wisdom which made this a part of Freemasonry. From Holy Writ we learn that the significance of the pillars was an establishment of strength; learned translators approve our belief that "porch" probably meant "arch" rather than place of refreshment. But the "arch" itself is significant; it is the mummy of that ancient belief that heaven was an arch, or curved structure above the earth. Our symbolism, then, supports heaven, a place of happiness, only by established strength, and "establish" is but another name for "control."

"Strength" or power, which is "established" or controlled, is illustrative of the principle of balance, which in turn, is the underlying fundamental law of all we know of the universe, of all we learn in scientific investigation, of all we have discovered of the "why" of things. The earth

is balanced in its orbit about the sun by the pull of gravity on one side, the force we call centrifugal upon the other. The explosive force which is the incomprehensible speed of the electron about the nucleus, the whole making what we call an atom of matter, is balanced by that other strange force we term cohesion, which keeps the atoms together and makes them form an apparently indestructible and inert matter. Love of life and selfishness are balance against love of our fellowmen and altruism; wherever the balance is upset, some sort of chaos follows; wherever it is preserved, peace and order result. Our pillars, then, as the mummy of the dead body of the ancient belief in the efficacy of balance, as the controlling and dominating power which rules all life, all things, all idea, is one well worth attention within tiled doors He who takes off the wrappings of time, and discovers through wall after wall laid about it by the years, the inner meaning of this carefully preserved truth, is one with the wise scientist who reads painstakingly and lovingly whatever he may of the riddle which is in the coffin of the long, long dead Egyptian Pharaoh.

Among the many mummies of truth in Freemasonry is that of the body of ethics; standards of conduct. Freemasonry teaches in words that a Freemason must square his actions by the square of virtue, that he stand erect as invoked by the plumb. But for all the apparently plain instruction, here is a dead body of truth awaiting the reviving touch of understanding.

Level and plumb are matters of longitude and latitude. What is level in New York is angular in London. The earth is a sphere, not a plane. What is level is coincident with a tangent to the face of the sphere at the place where the level is. The Woolworth Tower in New York and the Eiffel Tower in Paris are both plumb to the surface in their respective localities, but they are not parallel to each other. So a square made by a level and a plumb in one place, under one set of circumstances, may not be a square in some other place and under some other circumstances. The Parisian has no moral right to condemn the Woolworth Tower because it is not parallel to the Eiffel Tower. The New Yorker cannot truthfully contend that the base of the Nelson Statue in Trafalger Square is not level because a line drawn parallel with it would not coincide with the base of Grant's Tomb on Riverside Drive. Each is level for its location, as each tower is plumb in its place of erection.

We must square our actions with the square of virtue which is of our own time, our own place, our own ideas; not by those of others. To contend that there is but one square of virtue, one level, one plumb for all people of all times is at once to arrogate to ourselves the only real possession of the truth, and to miss completely the hidden meaning in the mummy which is the symbol. But if we erect our buildings and our characters, square our foundations and our actions, stand our towers and our virtues by the measure of our own tools, our own consciences, then, indeed, do we begin to see the ancient mummy fill out to life-like proportions and the hue of life tinge the long dried flesh of a symbol which was old when Tut-amen was not yet born.

We are taught in Freemasonry that Logic, one of the seven liberal arts and sciences, is highly important. We are also taught Mathematics and Geometry, or Masonry; and that the study

thereof makes a wise Freemason. Yet, mathematics can be used to demonstrate as a truth, that which is false; and logic can be twisted to prove as fact, that which is fancy.

Let him who doubts this consider this argument. Take as premises the statements that space is infinite, without limits, and that the earth moves about the sun. The first we believe, the second we prove with a telescope as well as common experience. It follows, logically, that the earth moves in space. If the earth moves in space, it must proceed from some point or location to some other point or location. So much seems perfectly demonstrable.

Yet, if space is infinite, we cannot conceive motion in it with respect to it, because anything that exists in limitless space must be considered as without relation to limits which do not exist. To move in limitless space is to become "nearer" to something and "farther" from something else. If there is no "something else," obviously there can be no motion in relation to space.

The same argument is applicable to time. We consider ourselves, our race, our earth, as moving through time, from something we call "the beginning" towards we know not what. But we cannot move in time without getting farther from that "beginning" and at the same time approaching what is connoted by a "beginning;" that is, an "ending." Yet if time had a "beginning" what was before it? And if it has an "ending," what comes after? According to logic we can move in neither space or time, if both are infinite. We cannot conceive of either as other than infinite, we cannot conceive of them as finite, yet our common experience and our scientific measurements tell us that we do move in both space and time!

Here both logic and mathematics fail us. There are truths which neither the mind, nor any tool of mind, can appreciate. Logic, Mathematics and Geometry become to us, as Freemasons, less realities than symbols. They, too, are mummies yet to be unwrapped, yet to bring to us the meanings concealed within them.

It is no argument to say that what is concealed in a symbol must have been known to him who first concealed it. Those who wrapped the body of the dead Egyptian King in his vestments and preserved it with injections of bitumen and sweet spices of the East, knew nothing of what they did, save objective reality. Not for them was this preservation to be a great book to be read by the civilization yet to come. Not for them was his tomb to be a museum, his objects of gold to speak to us of today, of their lives, their times, their loves and deaths. They did but preserve their dead. It is we who have made of that simple preservation a tool with which to learn.

He who first put mathematics, geometry and logic into the body of Freemasonry may have had no knowledge that he was inspired to place there symbols which are mummies for us to unwrap; he did but add to the ritual of the degrees a suggestion of knowledge which seemed to him all thinking men should have. Those who embalmed King Tut-ank-amen, and William Preston and his contemporaries who wrote our Fellowcraft Degree, builded better than they knew, and gave to us more than they suspected.

What we do with these our mummies depends upon our wit, our skill, and our willingness to study. But even as King Tut-ank-amen; long, long dead; cometh back from the Halls of Amenti to teach us today what ancient Egypt knew of life and death, so come back to us the gentle shades which are the spirits of mathematics, logic and geometry; as considered in Freemasonry, to teach us if we will but learn. Wisdom is not of any one age or clime, but universal; only by patient thought and study can we hope to understand what Freemasonry really means. Even as the Egyptologist with reverent hands reads the riddle of long gone years in what those years have not destroyed, so may we, as Freemasons, read the riddle of long preserved truths in the mummies of Freemasonry as we unwrap them today.

STB - January 1926