

Secrecy

By Unknown

An old Greek philosopher, when asked what he regarded as the most valuable quality to win and the most difficult to keep, he replied: "To be Secret and Silent." If secrecy was difficult in the olden times, it is doubly difficult today, in the loud and noisy world in which we live, where privacy is almost unknown.

Secrecy is, indeed, a priceless but rare virtue, so little effort is made to teach and practice it. The world of today is a whispering gallery where everything is heard, a hall of mirrors where nothing is hid. If the ancient worshiped a God of silence, we seem about to set up an Altar to the God of Gossip.

Some one has said that if Masonry did no more than train its men to preserve sacredly the secrets of others confided to them as such – except where a higher duty demands disclosure – it would be doing a great work, and one which not only justifies its existence, but entitles it to the respect of mankind.

Anyway, no Mason needs to be told the value of secrecy.

Without it, Masonry would cease to exist, or else become something so different from what it is as to be unrecognizable. For that reason, if no other, the very first lesson taught a candidate, and impressed upon him at every turn in unforgettable ways, is the duty of secrecy. Yet, strictly speaking, Masonry is not a secret society, if by that we mean a society whose very existence is hidden. Everybody knows that the Masonic Fraternity exists, and no effort is made to hide that fact. Its organization is known; its Temples stand in our cities; its members are proud to be known as Masons. Anyone may obtain from the records of a Grand Lodge, if not from the printed reports of Lodges, the names of the members of the Craft. Nor can it be said that Masonry has any secret truth to teach, unknown to the best wisdom of the race. Most of the talk about esoteric Masonry misses the mark. When the story is told the only secret turns out to be some odd theory, some fanciful philosophy, of no real importance. The wisdom of Masonry is hidden, not because it is subtle, but because it is simple. Its secret is profound, not obscure.

As in mathematics, there are primary figures, and in music fundamental notes, upon which everything rests, so Masonry is built upon the broad, deep, lofty truths upon which life itself stands. It lives, moves, and has its being in those truths. They are mysteries, indeed, as life and

duty and death are mysteries; to know them is to be truly wise; and to teach them in their full import is the ideal at which Masonry aims.

Masonry, then, is not a secret society; it is a private order. In the quiet of the tiled lodge, shut away from the noise and clatter of the world, in an air of reverence and friendship, it teaches us the truths that make us men, upon which faith and character must rest if they are to endure the wind and weather of life. So rare is its utter simplicity that to many it is as much a secret as though it were hid behind a seven-fold veil, or buried in the depths of the earth.

What is the secret in Masonry? The "Method" of its teaching, the atmosphere it creates, the spirit it breaths into our hearts, and the tie it spins and weaves between men; in other words, the lodge and its ceremonies and obligations, its signs, tokens and words – its power to evoke what is most secret and hidden in the hearts of men. No one can explain how this is done. We only know that it is done, and guard as a priceless treasure the method by which it is wrought. It is the fashion of some to say that our ceremonies, signs and tokens are of little value; but it is not true. They are of profound importance, and we cannot be too careful in protecting them from profanation and abuse. The famous eulogy of the signs and tokens of Masonry by Benjamin Franklin was not idle eloquence. It is justified by the facts, and ought to be known and remembered:

"These signs and tokens are of no small value; they speak a universal language, and act as a password to the attention and support of the initiated in all parts of the world. They cannot be lost so long as memory retains its power. Let the possessor of them be expatriated, shipwrecked or imprisoned; let him be stripped of everything he has in the world; still these credentials remain and are available for use as circumstances require.

"The great effects which they have produced are established by the most incontestable facts of history. They have stayed the uplifted hand of the Destroyer; they have softened the aspirates of the tyrant; they have mitigated the horrors of captivity; they have subdued the rancor of malevolence; and broken down the barriers of political animosity and sectarian alienation.

"On the field of battle, in the solitude of the uncultivated forests, or in the busy haunts of the crowded city, they have made men of the most hostile feelings, and most distant religions, and the most diversified conditions, rush to the aid of each other, and feel a social joy and satisfaction that they have been able to afford relief to a brother Mason." What is equally true, and no less valuable, is that in the ordinary walks of everyday life they unite men and hold them together in a manner unique and holy. They open a door out of the loneliness in which every man lives. They form a tie uniting us to help one another, and others, in ways too many to name or count. They form a net-work of fellowship, friendship, and fraternity around the world. They add something lovely and fine to the life of each of us, without which we should be poorer indeed.

Still let us never forget that it is the spirit that gives life; the letter alone is empty. An old home means a thousand beautiful things to those who were brought up in it. Its very scenery and setting are sacred. The ground on which it stands is holy. But if a stranger buys it, these sacred things mean nothing to him. The spirit is gone, the glory has faded. Just so with the lodge. If it were opened to the curious gaze of the world, its beauty would be blighted, its power gone.

The secret of Masonry, like the secret of life, can be known only by those who seek it, serve it and live it. It cannot be uttered; it can only be felt and acted. It is, in fact, an open secret, and each man knows it according to his quest and capacity. Like all the things most worth knowing, no one can know it for another and no one can know it alone. It is known only in fellowship, by the touch of life upon life, spirit upon spirit, knee to knee, breast to breast and hand to hand.

For that reason, no one need be alarmed about any book written to expose Masonry. It is utterly harmless. The real secret of Masonry cannot be learned by prying eyes or curious inquiry. We do well to protect the privacy of the lodge; but the secret of Masonry can be known only by those who are ready and worthy to receive it. Only a pure heart and an honest mind can know it, though they be adepts in all signs and tokens of every rite of the Craft.

Indeed, so far from trying to hide its secret, Masonry is all the time trying to give it to the world, in the only way in which it can be given, through a certain quality of soul and character which it labors to create and build up. To the making of men, helping self-discovery and self development, all the offices of Masonry are dedicated. It is a quarry in which the rough stones of manhood are polished for use and beauty.

If Masonry uses the illusion of secrecy, it is because it knows that it is the nature of man to seek what is hidden and to desire what is forbidden. Even God hides from us, that in seeking Him amid the shadows of life we may find both Him and ourselves. The man who does not care enough for God to seek Him will never find Him, though He is not far away from any one of us.

One who looks at Masonry in this way will find that his Masonic life is a great adventure. It is a perpetual discovery. There is something new at every turn, something new in himself as life deepens with the years; something new in Masonry as its meaning unfolds. The man who finds its degrees tedious and its Ritual a rigmarole only betrays the measure of his own mind.

If a man knows God and man to the uttermost, even Masonry has nothing to teach him. As a fact the wisest man knows very little. The way is dim and no one can see very far. We are seekers after truth, and God has so made us that we cannot find the truths alone, but only in the love and service of our fellow men. Here is the real secret, and to learn it is to have the key to the meaning and joy of life.

Truth is not a gift; it is a trophy. To know it we must be true, to find it we must seek, to learn it we must be humble; and to keep it we must have a clear mind, a courageous heart, and the brotherly love to use it in the service of man.

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