

LIFE THROUGH THE EYES OF A MASON

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What you see in life depends upon where you stand, or what you bring to your point of vision. William Blake was standing on the shore one morning watching the sunrise. He turned to a friend who was standing nearby and asked "What do you see when you see the sun rise?" I see a big round golden coin, his friend replied. There was an embarrassed silence. Then the friend said to Blake, "What, Sir, do you see?" And Blake replied "I see an innumerable company of angels, crying Holy, Holy, Holy, the whole earth is filled with the Glory of God." What made the difference? The difference was what each man brought to his point of vision.

A lumberman eyeing a stand of timber would probably estimate the average height and diameter of the trees, the number of logs to produce a thousand feet of lumber, and at the current market price would produce so much money. Joyce Kilmer would look at the same trees and say "I think that I shall never see a poem as lovely as a tree; a tree that looks at God all day and lifts her leafy arms to pray... Poems are made by fools like me but only God can make a tree." What makes the difference? The difference was what each person brought to his point of vision.

Freemasonry creates a point of view, or a point of vision, or a scale of observations, that enables us to see things to which others are blind. The great artist Turner would not let a visitor go directly from the street into his gallery where his paintings were on exhibition. They first had to spend some time in a darkened room for he said that people could not see the beauty of his work with the glare of the street in their eyes. Freemasonry gives us a new perspective of life as well and takes from our eyes the glare of a harsh, materialistic world and enables us to see life from the viewpoint of Brotherhood. I have been a Mason for almost 33 years and I want you to reflect with me on some of the things I have learned as I have looked upon life through the eyes of a Mason.

PROLOGUE

There is a common notion that Masonry is a secret society which notion is based presumedly on secret rites used in its initiations and the signs and grips by which its members recognize each other. Thus, it has come to pass that the main aims of the order are assumed to be a secret policy or teaching, whereas its one great secret is that it has no secret. Its principles are published abroad in its writing; its purposes and laws are known as are the times and places of its meetings. It has come down from the dark days of persecution, when all the finer things in life sought the protection of seclusion. If it still adheres to secret rites it is not to hide the truth but the better to teach its principles more impressively, to train men in its proper service and to promote union and harmony with all mankind. Its signs and grips serve as a kind of universal language, and still more as a gracious cover for the practice of charity - making it easier to help a fellow man in dire plight without hurting his self respect. The few that are attracted to Masonry by curiosity all remain to pray, finding themselves members of a great historic fellowship of the seekers and finders of God. It is old because it is true; had it been false it would have perished long ago. When all men practice its simple precepts the innocent secrets of Masonry will be laid bare, its mission accomplished and its labour done.

When I first moved through the door of the preparation room which opened up into Masonry, I learned one of life's greatest lessons, that as dependence is one of the strongest bonds of society, Masons were made dependent upon one another whereby they are afforded better opportunities to form their bonds of love and friendship.

Up to that moment I had heard much of those who professed to be self made men, and I felt that I had as good a claim to be regarded as such as any of them. Like the others, I wanted to be "beholden to no person." I was on my own and proud of it. Then I discovered in Freemasonry I was not going anywhere on my own. My boasted independence was torn to shreds as I felt a comforting hand under my arm to provide me the guidance without which I would have been completely lost.

My first experience in Freemasonry taught me the universal fact of dependence. All over the land there are men who are referred to as "self-made-men." Probably they had little when they started out in life but have since become more successful and quite wealthy. They claim to have done t all by themselves. Such a claim is absurd.

Economics teaches us that the factors which provide wealth are land, labour and capital. One day a member of the craft enabled me to see these factors of wealth in human terms. Land is not just the earth. It is all the physical resources of the planet: the fertility of the soil, the minerals in the ground, the fish in the sea, the air we breathe. Your self-made-man was absolutely dependent upon these things for his wealth, but he produced none of them.

The second factor in the provision of wealth is labour. Labour is not just men who work with their hands nor the energy which they expend upon production. Labour is the society of man. There is the group which produces what the self-made-man has to sell, and the group which buys what the self-made-man has caused to be made. He did not create these groups but without them he could not succeed.

The third factor in the provision of wealth is capital. Capital is much more than that ordinarily identified as money. Capital is the brains and personality with which

a man is born. Capital is the potential executive ability which is developed. Without capital there can be no wealth. Your self-made-man did not create this capital.

Take away from the self-made-man all those things which have been factors in the provision of his wealth and what have you left? Not an independent man, certainly; and not a self-made-man in any sense of the word. Without the things upon which he has to depend, not figuratively but literally, not relatively but absolutely, there would be no wealth.

Freemasonry makes a great contribution to us, and to the world, in its dramatization of the fundamental principle of dependence. No man is able to live a constructive life until he realizes the debt he owes to others. There is a story in the Bible, the book we refer to as the Great Light in Masonry, that is appropriate here. King David was beleaguered in the Cave of Adullam by the Philistines. From the mouth of the cave he could look across the valley to the town of Bethlehem where he was born, but at that time in the hands of the Philistines. A strange longing came over him and he said "O that one would give me to drink of the water of the well that is near the gate in Bethlehem." Three of his mighty men heard him, broke through the host of the Philistines, got the water and brought it to him. David must have taken the gourd of water eagerly and lifted it to his lips to satisfy his longing and thirst. Not so, his eyes fell upon the three mighty men, their faces streaked with sweat and blood, their clothes torn from the struggle with the Philistines, and he said "I cannot drink it for it is the blood of the men who went in jeopardy of their lives." And he poured the water out as a libation, as a drink offering to the Lord. For one brief moment in his life David was a complete human being.

The hallmark of the civilized man is the ability to see in terms of its human costs, that which he uses. This life of ours that we take for granted and in nonchalant fashion permit it to be absorbed in trivialities; this education that has

greatened our abilities and enriched our lives; this liberty, which in a real sense, makes possible all that we enjoy in life; a religion that gives us faith and hope for time and eternity, were not created by ourselves alone. They are the work and sometimes the sweat, blood and tears and sacrifice of those who went in jeopardy of their lives; and should be used, not selfishly, but in the interest of building a world in which all men may seek and find fulfilment in life.

As I have seen life through the eyes of a Mason, I have been impressed with the necessity of emphasizing reality in life. We seem to have an inborn aversion to facing life realistically. Yet nothing is needed more desperately. Governments legalize gambling and its iniquitous results. TV advertisements plead with their viewers to drive safely and then blithely urge them to partake of the commodity being advertised that would make it impossible for them to drive safely. We who are interested in a united church find it more tragic than amusing to hear ecumenically minded men plead for a united church only to insist on a theology that could only result in a divided church. There will be no united church until we are willing to face reality and to formulate a theology for a united church.

Freemasonry demonstrated that it is realistic when it places in our hands the working tools of the different degrees. Just as it is true that you cannot build a cathedral without working tools, so is it true that you cannot build a life without working tools, that is, you cannot build a life without fulfilling the conditions for the building of a life. There is no use wishing for ends if we are not ready to will the means to achieve those ends. It is impossible for me to believe that Russia and the United States have the brains to put a man in space, calculate his orbit and keep him in it; arrange for his return and bring him back within a few seconds of the calculated time but have not the brains to work out an international agreement that will assure peace and security for the world. Therefore we are compelled to conclude that we do not have the character power equal to the demands of the world in which we live, in other words, we do not have the working tools of character which we so greatly need.

As I have seen life through the eyes of a Mason, I have become more conscious of the fact and the importance of an obligation in life. I mention this subject in spite of the fact that we all know some people who are trying to find ways to rid themselves of their obligations. We are constantly looking for some way to qualify our obligations, but Freemasonry teaches us that there is no qualifications of equivocation, reservation or evasion.

There, at the centre of the Lodge, I learned that at the centre of life there is obligation. But the nerve centre of obligation is responsibility. Obligation is predicated upon a sense of responsibility. Our Masonic obligation is more than an engagement into which we enter with our Brethren in Freemasonry. It symbolizes the fact that every relationship we form compels some new obligation. Our relationship to Freemasonry brings to us a great privilege but with it a corresponding obligation, just as every cherished right, whether political, religious or social, carries with it a corresponding duty.

Our Masonic obligation demands that our lives be the pledge of our fidelity. We should never forget that in the figurative language we use there are no broken obligations without penalties. There is nothing strange or peculiar about this. There is not a law on the statute books of any country whose violation does not carry a penalty of some sort. Go back to 1914 when the treaty obligation of Germany, to respect the neutrality of Belgium, was denounced by Germany as a "scrap of paper". The whole world suffered the penalty of that broken obligation. World War II was the penalty of Hitler's broken obligations. All the difficulties we have had with Russia over East and West Berlin have been the result of broken obligations. We have all seen many heartbreaking situations. In every case the heartbreak has been the penalty of a broken obligation. It is not always the one who breaks the obligation who suffers the penalty, but someone pays the price. There is no principle that Freemasonry could drive more forcibly into the consciousness of the world than this, there can be no broken obligations without penalties.

These things that I have seen through the eyes of a Mason clearly illustrate that Freemasonry has a message for the world. It is the message that because of our interdependence we must learn to live together - recognize the inherent worth of all men, and the ability of every race to bring enrichment to the lives of all men. It is the message that we must emphasize reality in life, cleaving to the truth in scorn of consequence. It is the message that at the centre of life there is obligation, from which neither man nor nation can escape and in obedience to which, each shall serve the interest of all and all shall serve the interest of each.

Such are the ideals of Masonry and fidelity to all that is holy demands that we give ourselves to it, trusting the power of truth, the reality of love and the sovereign worth of character. For only as we incarnate that ideal in actual life and activity does it become real, tangible and effective. God works for man through man and seldom, if at all, in any other way. He asks for our voices to speak His truth, for our hands to do His work here below - sweet voices and clean hands to make liberty and love prevail over injustice and hate. Not all of us can be learned or famous, but each of us can be loyal and true at heart, undefiled by evil, undaunted by error, faithful and helpful to our fellow souls. Life is a capacity for the highest things. Let us make it a pursuit of the highest - an eager, incessant search of truth that through us the Spirit of Masonry may grow and be glorified.

When, then, is a man a Mason? He is a Mason when he can look over the rivers, the hills and the far horizons with a profound sense of his own littleness in the vast scheme of things, and yet have faith and hope and courage - which is the root of every virtue. When he knows that down in his heart every man is as noble, as vile, as divine, as diabolic and lonely as himself and seeks to know, to forgive and to love his fellow-man. When he knows how to sympathize with men in their sorrows knowing that each man fights a hard battle against many odds. When he has learned how to make friends and to keep them and above all how to keep friends with himself. When he loves flowers, can hunt birds without a gun, and feels the thrill of an old forgotten joy at the sound of the laughter of a child. When he can be happy and high-minded amid the meaner drudgeries of life. When the

glint of the sunlight on flowing waters subdue him like the thought of one much loved and one long dead. When no voice of distress reaches his ears in vain and no hand seeks his aid without response. When he finds good in every faith that helps any man lay hold of divine things and sees majestic meanings in life, whatever the name of the faith may be.