

The Spirit of Masonry

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The crest and crowning of all good,
Life's final star, is Brotherhood;
For it will bring again to Earth
Her long-lost Poesy and Mirth;
Will send new light on every face,
A kingly power upon the race.
And till it comes we men are slaves,
And travel downward to the dust of graves.
Come, clear the way, then, clear the way:
Blind creeds and kings have had their day.
Break the dead branches from the path:
Our hope is in the aftermath--
Our hope is in heroic men,
Star-led to build the world again.
To this event the ages ran:
Make way for Brotherhood--make way for Man.

EDWIN MARKHAM, Poems

OUTSIDE of the home and the house of God there is nothing in this world more beautiful than the Spirit of Masonry. Gentle, gracious, and wise, its mission is to form mankind into a great redemptive Brotherhood; a league of noble and free men enlisted in the radiant enterprise of working out in time the love and will of the Eternal. Who is sufficient to describe a spirit so benign? With what words may one ever hope to capture and detain that which belongs of right to the genius of poetry and song, by whose magic those elusive and impalpable realities find embodiment and voice?

With picture, parable, and stately drama, Masonry appeals to lovers of beauty, bringing poetry and symbol to the aid of philosophy, and art to the service of character. Broad and tolerant in its teaching, it appeals to men of intellect, equally by the depth of its faith and its plea for liberty of thought--helping them to think things through to a more satisfying and hopeful vision of the meaning of life and the mystery of the world. But its profoundest appeal, more eloquent than all others, is to the deep heart of man, out of which are the issues of life and destiny. When all is said, it is as a man thinketh in his heart whether life be worth while or not, and whether he is a help or a curse to his race.

Here lies the tragedy of our race:

Not that men are poor;
All men know something of poverty.
Not that men are wicked;
Who can claim to be good?
Not that men are ignorant;

Who can boast that he is wise?
But that men are strangers!

Masonry is Friendship - friendship, first, with the great Companion, of whom our own hearts tell us, who is always nearer to us than we are to our-selves, and whose inspiration and help is the greatest fact of human experience. To be in harmony with His purposes, to be open to His suggestions, to be conscious of fellowship with Him - this is Masonry on its Godward side. Then, turning man-ward, friendship sums it all up. To be friends with all men, however they may differ from us in creed, colour, or condition; to fill every human relation with the spirit of friendship; is there anything more or better than this that the wisest and best of men can hope to do?

Such is the spirit of Masonry; such is its ideal, and if to realize it all at once is denied us, surely it means much to see it, love it, and labour to make it come true.

Nor is this Spirit of Friendship a mere sentiment held by a sympathetic, and therefore unstable, fraternity, which would dissolve the concrete features of humanity into a vague blur of misty emotion. No; it has its roots in a profound philosophy which sees that the universe is friendly, and that men must learn to be friends if they would live as befits the world in which they live, as well as their own origin and destiny. For, since God is the life of all that was, is, and is to be; and since we are all born into the world by one high wisdom and one vast love, we are brothers to the last man of us, forever! For better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, and even after death us do part, all men are held together by ties of spiritual kinship, sons of one eternal Friend. Upon this fact human fraternity rests, and it is the basis of the plea of Masonry, not only for freedom, but for friendship among men.

Thus friendship, so far from being a mush of concessions, is in fact the constructive genius of the universe. Love is ever the Builder, and those who have done most to establish the City of God on earth have been the men who loved their fellow men. Once let this spirit prevail, and the wrangling sects will be lost in a great league of those who love in the service of those who suffer. No man will then revile the faith in which his neighbour finds help for today and hope for the morrow; pity will smite him mute, and love will teach him that God is found in many ways, by those who seek him with honest hearts. Once let this spirit rule in the realm of trade, and the law of the jungle will cease, and men will strive to build a social order in which all men may have opportunity "to live, and to live well," as Aristotle defined the purpose of society. Here is the basis of that magical stability aimed at by the earliest artists when they sought to build for eternity, by imitating on earth the House of God.

Our human history, saturated with blood and blistered with tears, is the story of man making friends with man. Society has evolved from a feud into a friendship by the slow growth of love and the welding of man, first to his kin, and then to his kind. The first men who walked in the red dawn of time lived every man for himself, his heart a sanctuary of suspicions, every man feeling

that every other man was his foe, and therefore his prey. So there were war, strife, and bloodshed. Slowly there came to the savage a gleam of the truth that it is better to help than to hurt, and he organized clans and tribes. But tribes were divided by rivers and mountains, and the men on one side of the river felt that the men on the other side were their enemies. Again there were war, pillage, and sorrow. Great empires arose and met in the shock of conflict, leaving trails of skeletons across the earth. Then came the great roads, reaching out with their stony clutch and bringing the ends of the earth together. Men met, mingled, passed and repassed, and learned that human nature is much the same everywhere, with hopes and fears in common. Still there were many things to divide and estrange men from each other, and the earth was full of bitterness. Not satisfied with natural barriers, men erected high walls of sect and caste, to exclude their fellows, and the men of one sect were sure that the men of all other sects were wrong--and doomed to be lost. Thus, when real mountains no longer separated man from man, mountains were made out of molehills--mountains of immemorial misunderstanding not yet moved into the sea!

Barriers of race, of creed, of caste, of habit, of training and interest separate men today, as if some malign genius were bent on keeping man from his fellows, begetting suspicion, uncharitableness, and hate. Still there are war, waste, and woe! Yet all the while men have been unfriendly, and, therefore, unjust and cruel, only because they are unacquainted. Amidst feud, faction, and folly, Masonry, the oldest and most widely spread order, toils in behalf of friendship, uniting men upon the only basis upon which they can ever meet with dignity. Each lodge is an oasis of equality and goodwill in a desert of strife, working to weld mankind into a great league of sympathy and service, which, by the terms of our definition, it seeks to exhibit even now on a small scale. At its altar men meet as man to man, without vanity and without pretence, without fear and without reproach, as tourists crossing the Alps tie themselves together, so that if one slip all may hold him up. No tongue can tell the meaning of such a ministry, no pen can trace its influence in melting the hardness of the world into pity and gladness.

The Spirit of Masonry! He who would describe that spirit must be a poet, a musician, and a seer - a master of melodies, echoes, and long, far-sounding cadences. Now, as always, it toils to make man better, to refine his thought and purify his sympathy, to broaden his outlook, to lift his altitude, to establish in amplitude and resoluteness his life in all its relations. All its great history, its vast accumulations of tradition, its simple faith and its solemn rites, its freedom and its friendship are dedicated to a high moral ideal, seeking to tame the tiger in man, and bring his wild passions into obedience to the will of God. It has no other mission than to exalt and ennoble humanity, to bring light out of darkness, beauty out of angularity; to make every hard-won inheritance more secure, every sanctuary more sacred, every hope more radiant!

The Spirit of Masonry! Ay, when that spirit has its way upon earth, as at last it surely will, society will be a vast communion of kindness and justice, business a system of human service, law a rule of beneficence; the home will be more holy, the laughter of childhood more joyous, and the temple of prayer mortised

and tenoned in simple faith. Evil, injustice, bigotry, greed, and every vile and slimy thing that defiles and defames humanity will skulk into the dark, unable to bear the light of a juster, wiser, more merciful order. Industry will be upright, education prophetic, and religion not a shadow, but a Real Presence, when man has become acquainted with man and has learned to worship God by serving his fellows. When Masonry is victorious every tyranny will fall, every bastille crumble, and man will be not only unfettered in mind and hand, but free of heart to walk erect in the light and liberty of the truth.

Toward a great friendship, long foreseen by Masonic faith, the world is slowly moving, amid difficulties and delays, reactions and reconstructions. Though long deferred, of that day, which will surely arrive, when nations will be reverent in the use of freedom, just in the exercise of power, humane in the practice of wisdom; when no man will ride over the rights of his fellows; when no woman will be made forlorn, no little child wretched by bigotry or greed, Masonry has ever been a prophet. Nor will she ever be content until all the threads of human fellowship are woven into one mystic cord of friendship, encircling the earth and holding the race in unity of spirit and the bonds of peace, as in the will of God it is one in the origin and end. Having outlived empires and philosophies, having seen generations appear and vanish, it will yet live to see the travail of its soul, and be satisfied-

When the war-drum throbs no longer,
And the battle flags are furled;
In the parliament of man,
The federation of the world.

Manifestly, since love is the law of life, if men are to be won from hate to love, if those who doubt and deny are to be wooed to faith, if the race is ever to be led and lifted into a life of service, it must be by the fine art of Friendship. Inasmuch as this is the purpose of Masonry, its mission determines the method not less than the spirit of its labour. Earnestly it endeavours to bring men--first the individual man, and then, so far as possible, those who are united with him--to love one another, while holding aloft, in picture and dream, that temple of character which is the noblest labour of life to build in the midst of the years, and which will outlast time and death. Thus it seeks to reach the lonely inner life of man where the real battles are fought, and where the issues of destiny are decided, now with shouts of victory, now with sobs of defeat. What a ministry to a young man who enters its temple in the morning of life, when the dew of heaven is upon his days and the birds are singing in his heart!

From the wise lore of the East Max Müller translated a parable which tells how the gods, having stolen from man his divinity, met in council to discuss where they should hide it. One suggested that it be carried to the other side of the earth and buried; but it was pointed out that man is a great wanderer, and that he might find the lost treasure on the other side of the earth. Another proposed that it be dropped into the depths of the sea; but the same fear was expressed--that man, in his insatiable curiosity, might dive deep enough to find it even there. Finally, after a space of silence, the oldest and wisest of the gods said: "Hide it in man himself, as that is the last place he will ever think to

look for it!" And it was so agreed, all seeing at once the subtle and wise strategy. Man did wander over the earth, for ages, seeking in all places high and low, far and near, before he thought to look within himself for the divinity he sought. At last, slowly, dimly, he began to realize that what he thought was far off, hidden in "the pathos of distance," is nearer than the breath he breathes, even in his own heart.

Here lies the great secret of Masonry--that it makes a man aware of that divinity within him, wherefrom his whole life takes its beauty and meaning, and inspires him to follow and obey it. Once a man learns this deep secret, life is new, and the old world is a valley all dewy to the dawn with a lark-song over it. There never was a truer saying than that the religion of a man is the chief fact concerning him. By religion is meant not the creed to which a man will subscribe, or otherwise give his assent; not that necessarily; often not that at all—since we see men of all degrees of worth and worthlessness signing all kinds of creeds. No; the religion of a man is that which he practically believes, lays to heart, acts upon, and thereby knows concerning this mysterious universe and his duty and destiny in it. That is in all cases the primary thing in him, and creatively determines all the rest; that is his religion. It is, then, of vital importance what faith, what vision, what conception of life a man lays to heart, and acts upon.

At bottom, a man is what his thinking is, thoughts being the artists who give color to our days. Optimists and pessimists live in the same world, walk under the same sky, and observe the same facts. Sceptics and believers look up at the same great stars--the stars that shone in Eden and will flash again in Paradise. Clearly the difference between them is a difference not of fact, but of faith--of insight, outlook, and point of view--a difference of inner attitude and habit of thought with regard to the worth and use of life. By the same token, any influence which reaches and alters that inner habit and bias of mind, and changes it from doubt to faith, from fear to courage, from despair to sun-burst hope, has wrought the most benign ministry which a mortal may enjoy. Every man has a train of thought on which he rides when he is alone; and the worth of his life to himself and others, as well as its happiness, depend upon the direction in which that train is going, the baggage it carries, and the country through which it travels. If, then, Masonry can put that inner train of thought on the right track, freight it with precious treasure, and start it on the way to the City of God, what other or higher ministry can it render to a man? And that is what it does for any man who will listen to it, love it, and lay its truth to heart.

High, fine, ineffably rich and beautiful are the faith and vision which Masonry gives to those who foregather at its altar, bringing to them in picture, parable, and symbol the lofty and pure truth wrought out through ages of experience, tested by time, and found to be valid for the conduct of life. By such teaching, if they have the heart to heed it, men become wise, learning how to be both brave and gentle, faithful and free; how to renounce superstition and yet retain faith; how to keep a fine poise of reason between the falsehood of extremes; how to accept the joys of life with glee, and endure its ills with patient valor; how to look upon the folly of man and not forget his nobility--in short, how to

live cleanly, kindly, calmly, open-eyed and unafraid in a sane world, sweet of heart and full of hope. Whoso lays this lucid and profound wisdom to heart, and lives by it, will have little to regret, and nothing to fear, when the evening shadows fall. Happy the young man who in the morning of his years makes it his guide, philosopher, and friend.

Such is the ideal 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 of 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 quest of truth; a noble utility, a lofty honour, a wise freedom, a genuine service - that through us the Spirit of Masonry may grow and be glorified.

When is a man a Mason? When he can look out over the rivers, the hills, and the far horizon with a profound sense of his own littleness in the vast scheme of things, and yet have faith, 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 as 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, yea, even in their sins - knowing that each man fights a hard fight 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 the birds without a gun, and feels the thrill of an old forgotten joy when he hears the laugh of a little child. When he can be happy and high-minded amid the meaner drudgeries of life. When star-crowned trees, and the glint of sunlight on flowing waters, subdue him like the thought of one much loved and 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 to lay hold of divine things and sees majestic meanings in life, whatever the name of that faith may be. When he can look into a wayside puddle and see something beyond mud, and into the face of the most forlorn fellow mortal and see something beyond sin. When he knows how to pray, how to love, how to hope. When he has kept faith with himself, with his fellow man, with his God; in his hand a sword for evil, in his heart a bit of a song - glad to live, but not afraid to die! Such a man has found the only real secret of Masonry, and the one which it is trying to give to all the world.