

THE ROAD

"So many men before thy Altars kneel Unthinkingly, to promise brotherhood; So few remain, humbly to kiss thy rood With ears undeafened to thy mute appeal; So many find thy symbols less than real, Thy teachings mystic, hard to understand; So few there are, in all thy far flung band To hold thy banner high and draw thy steel And yet . . . immortal and most mighty, thou!

What hath thy lore of life to let it live? What is the vital spark, hid in thy vow? Thy millions learned as thy dear paths they trod, The secret of the strength thou hast to give: "I am a way of common men to God."

THE SUBLIME DEGREE OF MASTER MASON

Similarities exist in all the degrees of Ancient Craft Masonry. Each has an entry, a reception, a circumambulation, an obligation, a bringing to light. Each discovers certain symbols to the initiate and, in demonstration and in lecture, gives him the key by which he may unlock the door behind which he will find their meaning.

In its Second Section the Sublime Degree departs from the familiar. Instead of being concerned with moral principles and exhortations, as is the first degree, or with architecture and learning, as is the second, it answers the cry of Job, "If a man die, shall he live again?"

The degree delves into the deepest recesses of a man's nature. While it leads the initiate into the Sanctum Sanctorum of the Temple, it probes the Holy of Holies of his heart.

As a whole the degree is symbolical of that old age by the wisdom of which "we may enjoy the happy reflections consequent on a well-spent life and die in the hope of a glorious immortality."

But it is much more than that. It is at once the universal and yearning question of man throughout all ages and its answer. To teaches no creed, no dogma, no religion; only that there is a hope of Immortality; there is a Great Architect by whose mercy we may live again, leaving to each brother his choice of interpretations by which he may read the Great Beyond.

It teaches of the power - and the powerlessness - of evil. For those who are happy in a belief in the resurrection of the physical body, the Sublime Degree has comfort. For those whose hope is in the raising only of that spiritual body of which Paul taught, the degree assures of all the longing heart can wish.

When the lesson of the greatest hope and the dearest wish of all mankind is made manifest, the Sublime Degree turns to this life and this brotherhood, and in the symbolism of the Lion, the exposition of the Five Points of Fellowship, the means by which a Mason may claim all that a man may from his brother, and the Word, ties together the Hiramite Legend and daily living in a manner which no thoughtful man

may see and hear without a thrill, a way at once awe-inspiring and heartening, terrible but beautiful, sternly uncompromising yet strangely comforting.

It is because the degree is all this - and more, much more, which cannot be put into words - that it means so much to those of whom it becomes a part. The ceremony is not of the earth, earthy, but of that land of the inner life, that home of the spirit where each man thinks the secret thoughts he tells never - never.

Pull the flower to pieces; remain the petals, a perfume, but no rose. Play the symphony, isolated note by note; sound is heard, but no music. Every word Milton wrote is in the dictionary but great poems may not there be found.

So of any written account of this degree; we may write of its symbols, analyze its legend, tell of its meaning, but we

pronounce but words without a rhyme, make a flower of wax, a song muted. The best we may do is to point out a path up the high mountain of spiritual experience which is the Sublime Degree, that he who climbs may see it with a new view - and clearer eyes.

"REMEMBER NOW THY CREATOR . . ."

Of all the quotations, allusions, facts, and names taken from the Great Light and made a part of the Masonic ritual none has a more secure place in the hearts of the brethren than the first seven verses from Ecclesiastes xii:

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy Youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them. While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, and the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low: Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, when the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

Of the two favorite interpretations of Biblical commentators one makes this dramatic passage a description of old age and senile decay; the other, a reference to the seldom experienced and much feared thunderstorm in Palestine.

The first gives advice to remember the Creator before the eyes begin to go blind, the hands begin to tremble, the legs to weaken, the teeth to drop out; before the old man is frightened at every little sound, even the voice of a bird, before his voice ceases to be musical; before "the almond tree shall flourish" - that is, the hair whiten like the almond tree in bloom - and so tiny a weight as that of a grasshopper be burdensome; before the silver cord (spinal marrow) be loosed or the golden bowl (heart) be broken and so on.

Whether or not the writer of this passage possessed a sufficient knowledge of anatomy to refer to the spinal cord, heart, internal organs, and brain as the "silver cord," the "golden bowl," the "pitcher," and the "wheel," is problematical. The storm interpretation is not open to such an objection; the little mills with which women ground corn would soon cease in the face of the feared thunder; the women in the houses would draw away from the windows and shut them and also the doors, but there is some difficulty in fitting the grasshopper and the almond tree into this analogy.

Read it how you will, the majestic and awe-inspiring poetry rings here the solemn warning with a shake of the heart and a shiver up the back.... Remember now thy Creator . . . now, before the fearsome storms of life, or the decay of old age is upon you; wait not until "fears are in the way" to cry for help to the Almighty. Delay not until toothless, sightless, white-haired age asks for help from on high because there is no help left on earth! Remember now thy Creator, while limbs are strong and desire ardent, while life pulses redly and the world is all before . . .

No man thinks of his Master Mason's degree but hears again in his heart at least the beginning and ending of this sermon in poetry: "Remember now thy Creator, in the days of thy youth; . . . then shall the dust return to the earth as it was and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it " The solemn strokes on the bell which is Ecclesiastes and the heart-gripping drama of the Legend of Hiram Abif are never to be known apart by him who has met them together.