

Masonic Symbolism By Harold Linke

MASONIC SYMBOLISM By Harold A. Linke, P.M. Christopher Diehl Lodge No. 19, F.& A.M. Garfield, Utah - October 4, 1933 Freemasonry is an Institution, founded upon the purest principles of Morality and Virtue, teaching the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man.' We use the verb teaching in this definition, but just how is that teaching accomplished? The answer is: By Symbolism.

The Masons hear this word constantly but, unless of an inquiring turn of mind, we put up with it, then accept it and finally vaguely consider it more or less anonymous with Masonry. The word symbol is derived from a Greek word which signifies a sign by which one knows or infers a thing. A symbol is always an object and suggests something higher than appears to the eye. The American Indian totem-poles are an example of the symbolic treatment of tribal and family descent.

Symbolism has had its widest range in connection with religion. It is found in rudest form in Africa and the Australian Archipelago. Elaborate symbolic designs are carved on the monuments of Central America. The phallus, as a symbol of reproductive powers, has wide use, while the swastika in all quarters of the world is a religious symbol.

Our Masonic symbolism is simply an objective expression of some moral, philosophical or religious thought. For example: The plumb is a symbol of rectitude of conduct; the level, of equality; the beehive, of industry. King Solomon's temple was adopted by Freemasonry as its paramount symbol. That wonderful edifice as described in the Bible is peculiarly adapted to the idea of the temple of human character, which it symbolizes.

When the neophyte presents himself for initiation, he finds himself faced with the great problem of personal responsibility and individual accountability. His first symbol is the hoodwink which represents ignorance. It is not intended principally as a means of concealing something from him but that he, being in darkness and ignorance, may prepare himself for the revelations that will soon thereafter be made. Its removal is symbolic of that ignorance which Freemasonry undertakes to remove from the mind of man, that antisocial spirit from which grow those things which make life unhappy and unkind.

The cabletow may be considered as symbolic of external restraints such as fear of adverse opinions or fear of incurring the displeasure of others. After removal of the cabletow the candidate is restrained by his voluntary obligations, suggesting the exercise of vigilance and self control; suggesting also the difference between bondsman and freeman. Although many values have been given the "length of my cabletow", the expression is really symbolic and means: "the scope of a man's reasonable ability".

The Lodge is so well defined in the E.A. lecture, both materially and symbolically, that it would seem superfluous to discuss it here; but sometimes a change in wording will accentuate a point perhaps better than constant repetition. The Lodge is a symbol of the world. This idea is borrowed from the temples of the Egyptians. Its form is ideally a

double cube, including the "Heaven above; and the Earth beneath", in that its floor is an "oblong square", this figure being considered by ancient peoples to be the shape of the earth. In this symbolic world a number of otherwise discordant men become organized into a harmonious body, all cooperating in harmony, emblematical of the state of harmony in which the real world might find itself if organized in such a manner that every man accorded equal rights to every other man and each willing to expend his energy in the interest of our common humanity. In the rite of circumambulation it will be noted that the candidate walks in harmony with the sun, indicating the necessity of working in harmony with natural laws.

Again, the candidate may be considered as symbolical of the world traveling in its elliptical orbit about the Great Light. The Holy Bible is itself symbolic. It symbolizes the perpetual revelation being made by the Creator to mankind everywhere. In accordance with this, Lodges may use as the Great Light the Book held sacred in the land where they are situated.

It will be remembered that we are not required to subscribe to any given conception of TGAOTU but each is left freely to form his own conception. A Mason is a builder and a Freemason is a free-builder, that is, an interpretation of the plans found on the great Masonic Trestleboard in accordance with his own personal convictions. Our ancient Brethren believed that the earth was a great plane having four equal sides and four corners or angles. The square that is used by workmen to test right angles was taken as a symbol of the earth, of the material and of the sensual.

The compasses used by astronomers to indicate the orbits of the heavenly bodies were taken as a symbol of the higher, the spiritual, of the heavenly. When, during the ceremonies of the degrees, the candidate observes the dominance of the square, it symbolizes that in his condition he is in a state of darkness, that his higher, or spiritual, faculties are under domination of the lower, the material, the sensual. When the square and compasses are interlaced, that the sensual has, to some extent, come under the dominion of the spiritual and when the compasses dominate the square it symbolizes that he is a Master in control of his appetites and passions. Of the apron much has been written that seems to me very much like over-drawn nonsense.

The apron lecture is a beautiful expression of the symbolism of the badge of a Mason and my personal opinion is that this may be considered practical and complete. It seems fitting and proper that an Entered Apprentice finds his station in the North-East is neither North nor East but is mid-way, partaking of both the North, which is a place of darkness (a symbol of the profane and unregenerated world), and the East which is the place of Light, Knowledge, and Wisdom. Even as youth Apprentice in Fraternity, the spiritual is said to be the cornerstone of society, so may the Entered this station be considered as the cornerstone of the man freely dedicated and consecrated as a building stone in Temple of human society.

The acquisition of knowledge is described in the lecture as the peculiar work of the Fellow Craft.

Learning stores the mind with facts, preserves one from bigotry and superstition, offers to one the fellowship of great minds, quickness of perception, gives one, in short, a masterful intellect. It is into the possession of such riches as these that the winding stairs of the three virtues, the five human senses and the seven liberal arts and sciences bring a man at last. The Middle Chamber symbolizes that place in life in which we receive the reward of our endeavors. When one steps into the Third Degree he finds himself in an atmosphere very different from the First and the Second.

Whereas the first two degrees deliver their message in the terms of building, the Third speaks of a living and dying and rising again. And so compact is it of profound teachings that it furnishes many of the suggestions from which many of the so-called "higher degrees" have developed their magnificent teachings. So much has been written, so much has been said in explanation of the Hiram's Legend, its origin and symbolism that it would seem needless for me here to enter upon a dissertation of that subject. The lecture of the Third Degree covers the subject entirely and one never hears that lecture without receiving new and more impressive meanings.

Among the Jews the lion was sometimes used as the emblem of the Tribe of Judah; as the Messiah was expected to spring from that tribe, the lion was also made to refer to Him, as may be seen in the 5th verse of the 5th chapter of the Book of Revelation, where Jesus Christ is called the "Lion of the Tribe of Judah". Again, during the Cathedral building period, when symbolism was flowering out on all sides in medieval life, the lion was one of the most popular figures in the common, animal mythology. People believed that the whelps of the lioness were born dead and that at the end of three days she would howl above them until they were awakened into life. The early Freemasons read both these meanings, - Christ and Resurrection, - into the symbol.

When we consider that Freemasonry was Christian in belief down, at least, to the Grand Lodge era, it is reasonable to suppose that the lion symbol may have been one of the vestiges of that early belief carried over into the modern system. If this be the case, the Lion's Paw has the same meaning, whether we interpret it as an Egyptian symbol or a Christian emblem, since it stands for the life-giving power, a meaning that perfectly accords with its use in the Third Degree. It is not intended that what has been said is to be considered a complete exposition of Masonic symbolism; only a very small part of the subject has been covered. I trust that what has been said may have aroused interest sufficient to stimulate additional thought and research, which may result in the presentation of other papers on this subject which is of essence of Freemasonry.

We must not be unmindful of the fact that by symbol and allegory only does Masonry accomplish her teaching. A Brother once told me that he thought Masonry had a tendency to "soften" a man; that the practice of brotherly love was an ideal and all very fine for the clergy but not for the man who has to compete for a living. "Is it expected", said he, "that a man break out in a rash of loving kindness and good-will?", as the modern novelist would express it." It is my belief that this Brother expressed in words an idea which has lain dormant in many minds for many years.

His conception of "Brotherly love and friendship" was doubtless of the sentimentally emotional variety. But this is not the kind of love we are talking about. It is "brotherly love". Did you ever see two brothers sentimental about each other? Neither did I. I know a man who is employed as superintendent over a large force of men. He is not of a sentimental nor emotional nature; rather, he appears stony-faced and hard-boiled. You would never suspect him of being possessed of very much brotherly love, or of any other kind, for that matter. But if you observe his men, you will see that each one is in good spirits and interested in his work. You will see no evidence of antagonisms because antagonistic men are tactfully kept separated.

Poor work is not performed, not because of fear of public denunciation or through fear of discharge, but because these men have agreed that that class of work has gone out of style. Disputes are settled in an equitable manner regardless of age, seniority, position or favoritism. This man is a Mason who, when he was presented with the principal working tool of a Master Mason, resolved to use it in his daily life in the manner in which he understood its significance. Freemasonry teaches the initiate to think.

It was to cultivate habits of thought and meditation that Freemasonry adopted its system of veiled symbolism, its sphinx half buried in the sand. Freemasonry teaches the value of association; that a man cannot love God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength unless he also loves his fellowman, and that he cannot love his fellowman unless he comes into contact with him; unless he becomes interested in his neighbors' joys and sorrows, hopes and fears. Hence the necessity of the Lodge where each Brother meets every other Brother on the Level and learns to treat him on the Square.