

## WHAT MASONRY MEANS

by: Unknown

There were four of them in the Ante Room besides the Tiler; a Past Master, a Junior Officer, the Oldest Member and a newly raised brother. They had been telling the newly made brother what they could of the Ancient Craft, what he might expect from it and in it, and how he could proceed to get the greatest benefit from it.

When they had finished, he asked: Tell me, you are old and experienced in Masonry, what does it really mean to you? What does Masonry mean to me? The Past Master stopped to weigh his words. I think it means the chance of being of service to my fellow men.

I have had the distinguished honor of being selected, at one time, to preside over this lodge. The honor, deserved or not, came because I was willing to serve my fellow members and work for the good of the Order. As I look back on it, I see that readiness to serve was created in me by my feeling of gratitude to the Fraternity for what I had received from it. Yet, all that I did receive - friends, good times, instruction and a new idea - came to me from serving. So, in a way, I have to say that a desire to serve came from serving!

I think every man has a desire to be of use in the world. It may be in the big outside world, or some inner, restricted world; but the desire to serve is the same. The teacher in the schools is not one because of the rewards; a good teacher has to teach. He or she can't be happy doing anything else. The Minister in the church is seldom rewarded materially as he might have been in some other profession. His reward has to come from the consciousness of having been of use. I have talked to a great many men who are distinguished successes in their several lines, and none of them ever considered their material success as their greatest reward. I know a railroad builder who is far more proud of his success in tunneling a mountain than in the riches he has won for his family. I know a banker who points with much more pride to the businesses he has helped to build than to his own substantial fortune.

And so I find it in Masonry - there is a much greater joy in the actual feeling that one is of use to his fellows, than there is in the honor of being selected as one to lead, for a while, an organization.

I am still active in this lodge. There are no more honors for me to win here. I shall never be anything but a Past Master. Yet I find real pleasure in working on the Educational Committee, and in being a member of the Instruction Committee.

I believe that many men, especially those whose vocations in life do not appear, on the surface, as being of conspicuous service to mankind, find in Masonry an opportunity to express that altruism which is deep in every man's heart. They here express themselves as servants of men. They learn in order to teach. They work, in order that other men may have a better time, be happier and more comfortable. They call on the sick, not because it is the thing for a Mason to do, but to render to their unfortunate brethren some measure of comfort from their own state of health and happiness.

The lodge to me is place of labor - a place where I can be of some use in the world without thought of reward or hope of any material pay. Yes, I think I can answer your question by saying; Masonry means to me the chance to be of service.

The Junior Officer took up the conversation.

To me, Masonry means inspiration, he stated. I am a Municipal Court Judge. My daily work is concerned entirely with the lower, harder, meaner and dirtier side of life. I spend my day with bootleggers, wife-beaters, thieves, sneaks and dope-peddlers. I hear only the sadder sort of stories. If I believed all life was like what I see of it, I wouldnt want to live.

But, I don't believe it. A very wise old Judge, with whom I talked before I went on the bench told me that the most important thing a Judge had to do was to keep a sane viewpoint. He said a Judge who allowed himself to become warped in his valuation of human beings was not a good Judge. Masonry is the inspiration that keeps me from allowing what I see, to be, to me, all there is of life.

In Masonry I find only an altruistic viewpoint. There is not, anywhere in Masonry a single thing that is selfish. There is in it not a prayer for self. There is in it not a single act which a Brother does which is for himself. Officers in the Lodge, of whom Im proud to be one, work hard to put on a good degree, doing the work correctly, trying to make it impressive - why? Not for themselves, Not that they may get anything out of it, but in order that the candidate be properly impressed and instructed - so that he can make something of Masonry his own and thus be a better man. Brethren appointed on an investigating committee must go out and work. They must take time from their own pleasures or labors to look into the qualifications of anyone who wants to be a Mason, and has submitted a petition. There is nothing in it for them. They do it unselfishly, for their fellows, and the petitioner. That is inspiring. It shows that there is another side to life than the one I see all day long.

Anyone who sits all day in my sort of a court might well be excused for thinking that God has deserted a part of the earth, and some of His people. Its hard to believe that the drunken sot who beats an innocent child, the dope-peddler who deliberately tries to turn a school boy into a cocaine fiend so he can sell him Snow, the bootlegger who deliberately sells, to unsuspecting fools, booze he knows to be poisonous; can have any good in him. Masonry teaches me that there is good everywhere, in every man, if you only hunt deep enough. Masonry never lets me forget that a Perfect Ashlar is made of a Rough Ashlar - that the perfect stone is inside the rough stone all the time, only waiting the cunning hand of the workman to knock away the rough-nesses to reveal the perfection underneath. Masonry teaches me there is a perfect ashlar under the rough exteriors I see. I am not sure I could keep on knowing that, if it wasnt for Freemasonry raising my eyes upward and keeping always in my heart the knowledge that more men are good than bad, more men helpful than hindering, more men God-Fearing than God-Hating. So I must answer you, my brother, that to me Masonry means inspiration, a holding constantly before my inner eyes a spiritual ideal, so that I can forget the material wrong and evil which is so rife in the world in which I live.

Well, I'll agree that Freemasonry may be all things to all men, the Oldest Mason began, seeing that the Junior Officer had finished. And perhaps you won't think that what Masonry means to me is as big and as fine as the opportunity for service that the Past Master sees, and the inspiration that the Junior Officer finds. To me, Masonry means the chance to make friends.

The young man thinks that friends are easy to make, and I dare say many a man thinks he could make them as easily in a club or a board of trade as he could in a lodge. But there is a great difference between the friendships made in profane gatherings, and those which result from meeting ON THE LEVEL.

As I see it, there must be some sort of mutually shared background for any real friendship. Two men must have something to which both can hold if they are to draw themselves together, against the naturally repellent forces which makes us all suspicious of all the rest of humanity.

There is a GOLDEN CORD in Masonry to which we can all hold. We all have a cable tow about us, and by it we can pull ourselves closer together. We meet on a common level. We think the same sort of thoughts at the same time. When we worship the grand Artificer of the Universe, we do it in the same way, with the same words, at the same time. It is not germane to say, BUT SO THEY DO IN A CHURCH. for there are a great many churches, each with its own way of approach to the throne of the Most High. But in all Masonic lodges, the approach is one ground of unity, on which friendships may be formed.

There is another. How says our ritual? To relieve the distressed is a duty incumbent upon all, but particularly on Masons, who are linked together by an indissoluble chain of sincere affection. To soothe the unhappy, to sympathize with their misfortunes, to compassionate their miseries and restore peace to their troubled minds, is the great aim we have in view. On this basis we form out friendships and establish connections. I find the charity and the sympathy of a Masonic Lodge a great force in the making of friends, and strangely enough, it makes little difference which end of the golden cord the individual brother holds. If I sympathize and try to help my brother, I become friendly toward him. If I am in trouble, and he sympathizes with and tries to help me, I feel friendly toward him. I feel friendly to the new young brother just coming into the lodge because he has won his way against odds, into our charmed circle, and I wish him well. The mere wishing him good luck makes me feel friendly. To the older members, with whom I have stood so many times in lodge prayer, with whom I have joined so many times in degrees, with whom so many times I have visited the sick, attended funerals or enjoyed innocent gaiety at refreshment. I am friendly because of our common interests and feelings.

I have made, and I think that every good Mason does, some of the best friends in the world, through Masonic association. Masonry picks her brethren. We are all alike in a few fundamentals, before we become Masons.

So we have an unusual opportunity to make friends in Masonry. I think that must stand as my answer to our young brothers question, what Masonry means to me - an opportunity to make friends.

Now that our young friend has heard us, I should like to hear what he thinks. What, my brother, does Masonry mean to you? The newly raised brother flushed a

little, embarrassed at being called on for an expression of opinion in the presence of those so much older and wiser in the Craft.

Its all so new to me, he answered, hesitating a little, I am quite willing to take your several interpretations of Masonry and its meaning. But so far none of you has mentioned what it is to me, the of the opportunity which Masonry gives. To me, Masonry means a chance to learn. I have been instructed that I should study the seven liberal arts and sciences, and the several degrees all put a good deal of stress on the teachings of Masonry. I have read one or two books which hint at a great deal that is concealed, much more than is revealed. It seems to me that the world of study and information which Freemasonry opens up to her initiates is her greatest boon. I find a great many different interpretations of Masonic symbols.

Unless I conclude that some are right and some are wrong, a symbol must have many meanings. Yet only one is given in the degree. That must mean that it is intended that I study them, and dig into them for myself, and try to find all the various meanings.

My business in life is that of a teacher of English. I know how peculiar is the symbolism of words. Take the word profane, which one of you used. It comes from pro - without - and fane, the church. You used it as meaning just that - someone without the Temple of Freemasonry. Time has corrupted that good old English word to mean something entirely different - most of us think of something profane as meaning opposed to what is sacred; to profane is to make light of, or blaspheme that which is Holy. It seems to me that some Masonic symbols may have been changed by time, too, as words are changed, and that the patient digger after facts might uncover a mine of interesting and valuable information if he is willing to study. So, without in any way putting my thoughts forward as better than those I have heard, I think Masonry means to me, at least so far, an opportunity to increase my knowledge.

We haven't heard from the Tiler yet! The Past Master turned to the Guardian of the Door. What does Masonry mean to you?

Youve all wasted a lot of words to say something you all mean! responded the Tiler. One of you thinks Masonry means SERVICE, another thinks it means INSPIRATION. and another thinks it means FRIENDS, and still another thinks it means KNOWLEDGE. They all come from the same source. And that is what Masonry really means.

You have overlooked what is to me the most significant symbols. If Masonry means SERVICE, and FRIENDS, and INSPIRATION, and KNOWLEDGE; what else can you say it means, except just GOD?