

Studies in Blue Lodge Symbolism
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What are symbols? The simplest answer is to say that they are the storehouses in which wise men of the past have accumulated their wisdom. The assemblage of many symbols in our fraternity means that the fraternity is in itself a storehouse of the wisdom of many wise men. Wisdom can never be learned or taught by one man working alone; it is only when many men join their knowledge together that the truth is found. Many men in the past have wrought to discover truth; they have embodied their truths in symbols; in our Order these symbols are assembled together so that the wisdom of many wise men has been placed at our disposal; is not that a great privilege? Is it not a fine opportunity for those who desire to learn?

What do these symbols teach? It is not curious lore; it is not occultism; it is not information; it is the wisdom how to live; the purpose of Masonry as a whole is to teach men how to live and to help them to live and to learn how to live more and more. Each one of us needs to learn how to live; therefore Masonry has much to give to each one of us; we can help each other to learn how to live, therefore Masonry helps us to help each other. The symbols give us their wisdom, their light, their truth; we can receive this wisdom from them and we can then teach it to others. We can transform the dead symbol into life; that is the highest way to learn.

Why did the wise men of the past store their wisdom in symbols? Because, so we believe, symbols are forms of expression that never die. Language grows old and passes away; truth embodied in a language may become buried in the tomb in which the dead language lies. Books are not for the many; one cannot carry a book about with him in his mind. Institutions grow old and die; moreover, they cannot always be carried from country to country; truth embodied in institutions may become dead or lost to many. The teachers themselves have died and they could not themselves bring us their truth. There are many that cannot understand learned language; they need something very simple; they need to think in pictures; to think in pictures helps us all, because the mind seems to work that way. Symbols live on long after languages have died; symbols survive the wreck of institutions; they survive the teachers who have poured wisdom into them; they bring the truth to us in pictures so that all can conceive it; symbols are a deathless and universal language, the easiest to learn of all forms of language, the hardest to forget, the most packed with meaning. In teaching through symbols our Fraternity reveals itself as a very wise teacher. If the meaning of a symbol is often hidden from us that is to stimulate us to hunt for its meaning; hunting for its meaning develops our faculties; and the development of our faculties is one of the purposes and aims of wisdom.

To the man who has neither the eyes to see nor the will to work, Masonry seems to offer little; to him who will take the trouble to learn it has much to offer. Masonry holds rich gifts in its hands; are you willing to receive those gifts? You may if you are willing to study, to work, to develop. We have only that which we strive for; we possess only that which we earn; when truth is poured into a passive mind it is soon lost from that mind; when it is won by an active mind it becomes a part of that mind; when truth has become a part of the mind then is the mind truly cultured, for culture is that wisdom which has become a part of ourselves. Masonry helps to culture us by stimulating us to apply our mental powers to the study of those symbols in which many wise men have hidden truths so profound, so illuminating, so helpful, so packed with life. We ourselves, in this present hour, can best understand what symbols mean and how their meaning is to be discovered if we will turn to a few of them. Our selection may appear arbitrary, at first glance, but the meanings we shall win will fit themselves together into one lesson, into a truth that is one truth, the truth that wisdom is the learning how best to live, and that God helps each of us how best to live.

The beginning of wisdom is to develop ourselves; most of us have never discovered what are the possibilities of our own minds; we live poorly and meanly because we permit the highest powers to lie dormant; one is learning the wisdom of life when he strives to develop each power of himself to the uttermost. Of this the apron is the symbol. It means work; not manual work alone, but mental, and spiritual, and moral work also. The divinity of work; the divine necessity of work; the divine results of work; this is the truth taught us - through the apron. We are told that it is an older and nobler symbol than the Star, the Garter, the Roman Eagle. It is. God has been working from the beginning; to work is to do what God does; to do what God does is life. The apron teaches us one of the secrets of the divine life. It is not fame; it is not possessions; it is not pride, or lust for place or power; it is none of these things that deserve to stand as that which is the highest. The apron is higher than the symbols of these things because it is the symbol of the effort to develop ourselves; we can work on ourselves; we can work through ourselves; while we are working on and through ourselves we are then working to help others; to help others is God-like because God is always helping others. God Himself, in a certain deep sense, evermore wears the apron because He evermore works, works to help us, works to give us more and more life for evermore. What we make of ourselves is more important than what others make of us; how we use and develop ourselves is more important than what we possess or what reputation we may have. To work; to make the mind work, to make the body work, to make all things work together to give us life and to give others life, that is according to the will of God and the will of God is our life and our peace. He who wears the apron on his heart will become God-like because God's own heart is filled with labor on the behalf of all His worlds and all His children.

Many times our work asks of us that we sacrifice our ease, our pleasure, our place, or our money; he who is not willing to sacrifice the lesser for the sake of the

greater has not yet learned wisdom; he does not yet know to live. Sacrifice is not to lessen our lives; it is to increase our lives; it surrenders the petty things in order that the greater things may more completely possess us; he who has become willing to give up the lower in order that the higher may be in him has learned wisdom, for wisdom is to learn how best to live.

The cross which appears so often through our ritual and in so many different forms has many different degrees of meaning but the one meaning running through all forms of the cross is that he who would learn to live must learn to surrender willingly the things that hinder life. Sacrifice, if we will but learn it, is our friend; it gives us more life and what gives us more life gives us more love and love is in itself friendship. The cross sometimes breaks the body in order that the soul may have its way; the cross sometimes bruises the mind in order that the spirit may more richly live; the cross helps while it seems to hinder; it heals when it seems to hurt. To learn to know when to sacrifice, how to sacrifice, what to sacrifice, and for what to sacrifice, that is wisdom, and wisdom is to know to live.

But life is not complete in any one of us; life lives in all men and each needs the life of all; when we share with others our life we are helping them to live; when we help others to live we become God-like because God continually gives life to all. Friendship is just the habit of giving our life to others; when we give our life away we possess more of it; the more we give the more we receive. This is the meaning of the clasped-hands, one of the most divine and beautiful of all our symbols. The life in me clasps hands with the life in you; my life joins its forces with your life; that makes more life. Brotherhood is the enrichment of life not for one's self alone but for all; brotherhood is God-like because God is the Great Brother of all men. His hands are clasped with ours and neither disaster nor death can break that clasp. When we clasp our brother's hand we clasp God's hand because God lives and works through our brother; when he clasps our hands he clasps God's hands because God lives and works through us. Brotherhood makes life rich, beautiful, and divine; brotherhood is the clearest revelation of God that we have. Brotherhood is love expressed toward our fellows; it is therefore divine because God is love.

Our system of symbols would be very incomplete if they did not give us this highest wisdom that God is love. The All-Seeing Eye reminds us that God sees far into the most secret depths of each of us; this means that God lives in us a part of our very selves else He could not know what is in us; God is love because He lives in each one of us. The altar reminds us that we can always and everywhere meet with God; He is never away from our hearts; He is never away from home; the human soul is His home. While we work, while we play, while we think, above all while we love, we are with Him; each moment can have its own altar; each place may have its shrine; the whole world is a meeting place between man and God; the whole earth may become an altar. The raising of the master in our third degree reminds us, depicts for us in an unforgettable symbol, that God is also eternal life; the master went into the grave but God went in after Him; we never die; there is no death; there is only change; we go on from life to life, ever and forever, and God ever helps us to go on from life to life. To know that God lives in us and that God is

love helps us to lose all fears, the fear of disaster, of disgrace, of death; for where love is fear cannot be. The same eternal life which lived in the slain master lives also in us; God is continually willing to raise each of us from all our graves; from the grave of sloth, the grave of selfishness, the grave of hatred, of fear, of sorrow, of death. "Now have we eternal life"; always will we have eternal life. God is life and God is eternal. God is our life; therefore we are eternal.

Can there be, could there be, a teaching more wonderfully beautiful than this? Can you anywhere find a higher wisdom than this? This is the highest wisdom that we know how to live; God is our Life; to learn to live is to love God. Masonry teaches us that God is love; it teaches us how to love God. Masonry as a whole is one great symbol of men dwelling with God and God dwelling with men.

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