



LODGE VEGAS # 32

ETERNAL LIFE

I

That which I believe to be the central idea in the whole Hiram Abiff drama, and consequently the profoundest interpretation of it, is that embodied in the term used as the title of this section. I have chosen to consider it in a section apart, not only because its importance is deserving of such emphasis, but also because the truth of Eternal Life is so confused, so mingled with other very different ideas in the minds of men, that we have need of a careful analysis of the matter.

By Eternal Life we do not mean quite the same thing as we meant by a Future Life. Future Life, by virtue of the very words used to describe it, is a life that is supposed to lie in the future, beginning after death; Eternal Life will be lived in the great future, true enough, but is something more than that.

Nor is Eternal Life the same as Immortality, for Immortality means deathlessness that is, an existence of endless duration. It suggests a picture of life lived on a level line, of which line there is no end. Eternal Life includes this conception of infinite duration but it also includes much besides.

Again, Eternal Life is not to be identified with Resurrection. According to this latter hope the man who dies will be raised from the dead and will be the same man that he was before death. This also may be true, in some sense doubtless is true, but the idea is not the same as that meant by Eternal Life.

II

What, then, do we mean by Eternal Life? Briefly it may be put thus—there is something in every man, call it spirit, soul, a divine spark, or what you will, which even now belongs to another order of reality, and is not to be numbered among the things that go "into that utter passing away from which there is nothing to return." It is possible for a man to discover in himself those things that are most akin to God, and to keep these

things at the centre of his being: and it is possible for him to do this here and now, and under the very conditions which seem to us so broken and so unfavorable to high living, and not wait until after death. All of God, and all of the Universe, and all of the powers of human life—these are present with us now, and it is not necessary to postpone real life until after death.

III

It is the great tragedy in the life of many men that they so entirely devote themselves to the body's needs that they forget, or neglect, the spirit's needs. Giving themselves up to the search for temporalities, they leave the divines cravings in them to go unsatisfied; as a result they become materialistic, self-centered, vain, greedy, and animalistic; the soul becomes dissatisfied, God becomes unreal, and the future life uncertain; and they even fall into the fatal habit of making such Goodness, Truth and Beauty as they do find in themselves or others into a mere means to temporal gains. Such a man's whole life revolves about himself; he becomes his own world and his own God, and out of such a state grow the fears, doubts, superstitions, quarrellings, grasping, prejudices, envying, and hatreds, which so often make life a mere scramble after the things of self. In other words, small things are set at the centre of existence so that all the man's life is made up of temporalities.

The one remedy for this condition is to change the centre of gravity so that the spirit is master, and body is servant, so that search is made for the eternal things instead of wholly for the things that pass away. When this occurs, selfishness, envy, and materialism, vanish; the soul becomes the great reality; God draws very near and becomes very certain; the perspective of life is changed, and its scale of values is reversed. To be honorable and true, to love others, to live in pity, charity, and kindness, to know eternity as present and the present existence as a brief phase of an endless life, all this becomes for such a man the great ideal toward which all his energies are bent. Loss and disease may be serious but they are not fatal; even death is robbed of its terrors because the man's treasures are out of the reach of destruction.

This is Eternal Life. This is the "life of God in the soul of man," eternity in the midst of time, a divine-human experience possible in the Here and Now. To reach such an existence is in the power of every man; nay, it is the birthright, the God-intended plan, of every child of the race.

Herein, it seems to me, we have the reality of which the Lost Word is the mystic symbol; and he who has found that word within himself is victorious always, whatever betide. If he is betrayed by the friends in whom he has trusted, waylaid by ruffians, put to death in the midst of his creative and benignant work, and thrown into an unmarked grave, he is not defeated or destroyed; the God-like spirit within him, dedicated to the Eternal Values, raises him up from the level of death to the perpendicular of the life that is endless.

IV

If this be the true interpretation of the Raising, we can no longer agree with those who see in it merely a ceremony in witness to the Future Life of the soul. How could it be? The Raising is not accomplished on the other side of the grave but on this; out of the very disaster that overwhelmed him, out of the midst of that dreadful "masterful negation which men call death," the master is lifted up and made victorious. The Spirit is conqueror even Here.

Furthermore, and as I have already hinted, this interpretation makes void the theory which would have us believe that the Lost Word must be sought outside the Blue Lodge Ritual. When is the Master raised? Is it not in the Third Degree? Is not the very Power that raises him itself the thing we mean by the word? It is true that no word of a certain number of letters is given us; it is true that the secret is elaborated and made plain in a higher degree, but the power, the actual upraising energy of which such a word must be a symbol, is present, and does its work, inside the limits of the Degree!

As this understanding came home to me, and opened up within my mind, the whole of the Blue Lodge Ritual, nay, the whole of Masonry itself, became transfigured. Dark places filled with light, and obscure symbols, often so cryptic and dim, became eloquent with endless meanings. I found that every ceremony, from the first simple acts of the preparation room to the climax of the tragedy of the Third Degree, arranged itself in a solemn order that moved easily to its predestined goal. Freemasonry rose in my vision to the most divine heights, and I saw that it has in its heart an Eternal Gospel which gives it a place among the great witnesses to religion, and among the noblest of all the philosophies where through men have sought for light on the brief, broken, bewildering mystery of existence; and strength to live, unconquered and unashamed in the midst of so many enemies and defeats.

THE SHARP INSTRUMENT

After the candidate has effected his entrance a "certain sharp instrument"—(which should never be one of the working tools)—is applied in a peculiar manner, and a certain hint of the meaning of this is given, as the initiated reader will clearly remember. On all this there is no reason to comment save in brief manner, and then only on the meaning given as aforesaid. This meaning has especial significance to us because it sets forth the only *real penalty* that a Mason ever suffers for violating his obligation. (On "Obligation," see [p. 110.](#))

It is accurate to say that a majority of the attacks on Freemasonry have been occasioned by the "Penalties" which are supposed to be enforced on oath-violating members. Of these Penalties it is manifestly impossible here to speak, though there is much that could be said, orally, in a tiled lodge. It seems that their present form was derived from the seventeenth century English Treason laws, though certain particulars may be elsewhere traced. It is certain that we have not inherited them from the operative Masons, for we have many of their OB's in print, and a comparison of our own form with theirs is not

altogether to our advantage, as witness the following passage from MacBride's "Speculative Masonry":

"It seems to us, with these OB's before us, there is only one course open to all Masons desiring the welfare of our ancient institution, and that is to insist that a simpler, more sensible, and consequently, more solemn and binding form shall be substituted, wherever the corrupt form now prevails. The latter has neither the sanction of age, of law, of reason, nor of good taste."

This, it may be emphasized, is but a criticism of the *form* of the Penalties; I am very sure that neither Brother MacBride nor any other wise Mason will advocate the abandoning of Penalties else we leave out of our Symbolism a symbol of the everywhere present moral law that "the wages of sin is death." Truth dies out in the liar, Beauty dies out in the vulgar, Goodness dies out in the wicked, and the way of the transgressor is hard. Would ours be a complete *moral* science if it ignored this Divine law built into the spiritual structure of man?

There is more to be said. He who violates the laws of an art will lose out of his mind the power of that art. The pianist who occupies himself wholly with tin-pan rag-time loses the ability to play, and even to appreciate, real music. The author who descends to the "Diamond Dick" level of literature forfeits his ability to write nobler pages. The architect who scamps and cheats in his building will soon lose the skill of erecting structures that deserve the name of architecture, a fact brought out with convincing power by Robert Herrick in his great novel, "The Common Lot." So is it with him who deliberately transgresses the laws of the Royal Art of Freemasonry, the Art of noble brotherhood lived in the bonds of the Eternal Life; its skill and its influence will die out within him as if an instrument of torture had been plunged into his heart.

THE OBLIGATION OF SECRECY.

ONE of the most notable features of Freemasonry—one, certainly, which attracts, more than any thing else, the attention of the profane world—is that veil of mystery—that awful secrecy—behind which it moves and acts. From the earliest periods, this has invariably been a distinctive characteristic of the institution; and to-day, as of old, the first obligation of a Mason—his supreme duty—is that of silence and secrecy. Why is this? Why did Freemasonry, in the beginning, adopt the principle of secrecy, as a vital one? and why has it so persistently adhered to it, through all the changes that have swept over the earth, and transformed all things else?

The enemies of Freemasonry, like THOMAS PAINE and others, pretend that they have found the origin of Masonic secrecy in the fact that the esoteric doctrines of the Order were antagonistic to the prevailing opinions, and therefore could not safely be professed before the world. Hence, according to them, the retiring into silence and secrecy was simply an act of cowardice, to escape the danger that might follow the open and honest promulgation of an unpopular doctrine! Some distinguished Masonic writers have also—strange as it may appear—professed the same theory. We must nevertheless pronounce it

an exceedingly shallow and unphilosophical one. The obligation of secrecy does not owe its origin to any such cause. That origin must be found, and can only be found, in the *intrinsic value and divine excellence of the principle of secrecy itself*. Among the ancients, silence and secrecy were considered virtues of the highest order. The Egyptians worshiped Harpocrates, the god of secrecy, raised altars in his name, and wreathed them with garlands of flowers. Among the ancient Romans, too, these virtues were not less esteemed; and a distinguished Latin poet tells us, "*Est et fideli tuta silentio merces:*"—"for faithful silence, also, there is a sure reward."

Mystery has charms for all men, and is closely allied to the spiritual part of man's nature. The entire fabric of the universe is founded on secrecy; and the great Life-force which vivifies, moves, and beautifies the whole, is the profoundest of all mysteries. We cannot, indeed, fix our eyes on a single point in creation which does not shade off into mystery, and touch the realms of Eternal Silence. As the fathers of Freemasonry discovered that all life and beauty were elaborated in Night and Mystery, they made the Institution, in this respect, conform to the divine order of Nature. In the Pythagorean Freemasonry, silence and secrecy were religious duties, and held to be the most fruitful sources of intellectual and moral improvement. A distinguished modern writer * repeats the same idea in quaint but forcible language:—"Thoughts will not work, except in silence; neither will virtue work, except in secrecy: Like other plants, virtue will not grow, unless its roots be hidden, buried from the light of the sun. Let the sun shine on it—nay, do but look at it privily thyself—the root withers, and no flowers will glad thee."

In the grand mythology of ancient Scandinavia, there is a remarkable myth, called the Yggdrasil-Tree, or Ever-blooming Ash, whose top rose to the highest heavens, and whose roots struck down through the regions of everlasting gloom and night. From age to age, its branches, loaded with benedictions, spread out over all worlds, the delight of gods and men, diffusing life and beauty and fragrance through the universe. And all this glory, and these capabilities to bless, were the fruit of the mysterious and secret labors of the sacred Nornas, who perpetually watered its roots from the deep-hidden wells, and thus preserved its vigor and vitality.

The Yggdrasil-Tree is a beautiful symbolical representation of Freemasonry, and illustrates well the character of Masonic secrecy. Like that tree, in the youth of Humanity, the Mystic Order arose among the nations of the earth, and its ever-green branches spread over the world; and, by the vital power of its secret ministry, it diffused order, and beauty, and virtue, and civilization over all lands.

Another reason why Freemasonry regards secrecy as a fundamental principle is, because a unity, harmony, and strength can be secured thereby, which cannot be obtained in any other way. Secrecy has a mystic, binding, almost supernatural force, and unites men more closely together than all other means combined. The common possession of a secret by a considerable number of people, produces a family-feeling. There is something profoundly mystical in this, no doubt; but it is, nevertheless, a fact. Suppose two men, strangers, traveling in a distant country, should by some accident be brought together for a few brief moments, during which they happen to be the involuntary witnesses of some terrible

deed, a deed which circumstances demand shall remain a secret between them for ever. In all the wide world, only these two men, and they strangers to each other, know the secret. They separate; continents and oceans, and many eventful years, divide them; but they cannot forget each other, nor the dread mystery which binds them together as with an iron chain. Neither time nor distance can weaken that mighty bond. In that, they are *for ever one*.

It is not, then, for any vain or frivolous purpose that Masonry appeals to the principle of secrecy, but, rather, because it creates a family-feeling, insures unity, and throws the charm of mystery and poetry around the Order, making its labors easy and its obligations pleasant.

IN the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light. and there was light.

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Light is one of the requirements of a candidate at his initiation; and the material light which is afforded him is succeeded by an intellectual illumination, which serves to enlighten his path on the journey from this world to the next.

Symbolical Masonry by H.L. Haywood(1923)

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