



LODGE VEGAS # 32

Pythagoras

One of the most celebrated of the Grecian philosophers, and the founder of what has been called the Italic School, was born at Samos in the period of 586-69 B.C., the year 582 being favored as the probable one of his birth. Educated as an athlete, he subsequently abandoned that profession and devoted himself to the study of philosophy. He traveled through Egypt, Chaldea, and Asia Minor, and is said to have submitted to the initiations in those countries for the purpose of acquiring knowledge.

On his return to Europe, he established his celebrated school at Crotona, a Dorian Colony in the south of Italy, about 529 B.C., much resembling that subsequently adopted by the Freemasons. His school soon acquired such a reputation that disciples flocked to him from all parts of Greece and Italy. Pythagoras taught as the principal dogma of his philosophy the system of metempsychosis, or the transmigration of souls. He taught the mystical power of numbers, and much of the symbolism on that subject which we now possess is derived from what has been left to us by his disciples, for of his own writings there is nothing extant. He was also a geometrician, and is regarded as having been the inventor of several problems, the most important of which is that now known as the forty-seventh problem of Euclid. He was also a proficient in music, and is said to have demonstrated the mathematical relations of musical intervals, and to have invented a number of musical instruments.

Disdaining the vanity and dogmatism of the ancient sages, he contented himself with proclaiming that he was simply a seeker after knowledge, not its possessor, and to him is attributed the introduction of the word philosopher, or lover of wisdom, as the only title which he would assume. After the lawless destruction of his school at Crotona, he fled to the Locrians, who refused to receive him, when he repaired to Metapontum, and sought an asylum from his enemies in the temple of the Muses, where tradition says that he died of starvation at near the end of the sixth or the beginning of the fifth century. Some claim the date to be 506 B.C., when he was about seventy-six years old.

Pythagoras, School of

The schools established by Pythagoras at Crotona and other cities, have been considered by many writers as the models after which Masonic Lodges were subsequently constructed. They undoubtedly served the Christian ascetics of the first century as a pattern for their monastic institutions, with which institutions the Freemasonry of the Middle Ages, in its operative character, was intimately connected. A brief description of the school of Crotona will not therefore be inappropriate.

The disciples of this school wore the simplest kind of clothing, and having on their entrance surrendered all their property to the common fund. they then submitted for three years to voluntary poverty, during which time they were also compelled to a rigorous silence. The doctrines of Pythagoras were always delivered as infallible propositions which admitted of no argument, and hence the Greek expression he said it, was considered as a sufficient answer to anyone who demanded a reason. Aristotle, by the way, in his accounts of Pythagorean doctrines, refers with what appears to be a studied and cautious vagueness to the Pythagoreans, not to Pythagoras. The teaching was probably, according to recent investigation, as a rule credited to the founder.

The scholars were divided into Esoterics and Exsoterics. This distinction was borrowed by Pythagoras from the Egyptian priests, who practiced a similar mode of instruction. The exoteric scholars were those who attended the public assemblies, where general ethical instructions were delivered by the sage. But only the esoterics constituted the true school, and these alone Pythagoras called, says Jamblichus, his companions and friends. Before admission to the privileges of this school, the previous life and character of the candidate were rigidly scrutinized, and in the preparatory initiation secrecy was enjoined by an oath, and he was made to submit to the severest trials of his fortitude and self-command. He who after his admission was alarmed at the obstacles he had to encounter, was permitted to return to the world, and the disciples, considering him as dead, performed his funeral obsequies, and erected a monument to his memory.

The mode of living in the school of Crotona was like that of the modern Communists. The Brethren, about six hundred in number, with their wives and children, resided in one large building. Every morning the business and duties of the day were arranged, and at night an account was rendered of the day's transactions. They arose before day to pay their devotions to the sun, and recited verses from Homer, Hesiod, or some other poet. Several hours were spent in study, after which there was an interval before dinner, which was occupied in walking and in gymnastic exercises.

The meals consisted principally of bread, honey, and water, for though the table was often covered with delicacies, no one was permitted to partake of them. It was in this secret school that Pythagoras gave his instructions on his interior doctrine, and explained the hidden meaning of his symbols. There were three Degrees: the first or Mathematic, being engaged in the study of the exact sciences; and the second, or Theoretic, in the

knowledge of God and the future state of man; but the third, or highest Degree, was communicated only to a few whose intellects were capable of grasping the full fruition of the Pythagorean philosophy.

This school, after existing for thirty years, was finally dissolved through the machinations of Sylo, a wealthy inhabitant of Crotona, who, having been refused admission, in revenge excited the citizens against it, when a lawless mob attacked the scholars while assembled in the house of Milo, set fire to the building and dispersed the disciples, forty of them being burned to death. The school was never resumed, but after the death of the philosopher, summaries of his doctrines were made by some of his disciples. Still many of his symbols and his esoteric teachings have to this day remained uninterpreted and unexplained.

After this account of the Pythagorean school, the Freemason will find no difficulty in understanding that part of the so called Lowland Manuscript which is said to have so much puzzled the great metaphysician John Locke. This manuscript-the question of its authenticity is not here entered upon-has the following interesting paragraphs:

How comede ytt-Fremasonryn Engellonde? Peter Gower, a Grecian, journeyed for kunnyngye ye Egypte and in Syria, and yn everyche londe whereat the Venetians hadde plauntedde Maconrye, and wynnynge entraunce yn al Lodges of Maconnes, he lerned muche and retournedde and worked yn Grecia Magna wachsynge and becommynge a myghtye wysacre and gratelyche renowned, and here he framed a grate Lodge at Groton, and maked many Maconnes, some whereoffe dyd journeye yn Fraunce, and maked manye Maconnes wherefromme, yn process of tyme, the arte passed yn Engellonde.

Locke confesses that he was at first puzzled with those strange names, Peter Gower, Groton, and the Venetians; but a little thinking taught him that they were only corruptions of Pythagoras, Crotona, and the Phenicians. It is not singular that the old Freemasons should have called Pythagoras their "ancient friend and Brother," and should have dedicated to him one of their geometrical symbols, the forty-seventh problem of Euclid; an epithet and a custom that have, by the force of habit, been retained in all the modern instructions of the Craft.

Recent conclusions ascribe to Pythagoras and his followers equal esteem to that accorded them by the old Freemasons. In their mathematical work the leading characteristic was a combination of arithmetic and geometry. The studies containing the germ of algebra were developed in the Pythagorean School into a true scientific method in its theory of proportion and in fact Pythagoras has been not only credited with a method common in value to all branches of mathematics but to be personally comparable himself with Descartes who decisively combined geometry and algebra.

- Source: Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry

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