



## **VEGAS LODGE #32**

### **Wolfgang Goethe**

Here is an article of so many excellences that to praise it would be presumptuous. It tells of Goethe, the author of Faust, a world figure in literature along with Homer, Dante and Shakespeare, and one of the greatest teachers of the race that has ever lived. Freemasonry mirrored itself in his mind as a universal brotherhood within the circles of which men may learn to live happily together in forgetfulness of the animosities of religion, race and politics; he saw it as an earnest and prophecy of the good time coming when the brotherhood of man will be something more than an ineffectual dream. How noble is such a conception, and how wise, when compared with the attempts now being made in some quarters to drag back into the lodge the old religious hatreds and sectarian bitterness's thrown aside by our forefathers long ago!

This is a story of the Craft in days long past, and in a world of men and ideas far distant from that in which we live and move. In it we have a picture of Freemasonry as practiced in the eighteenth century by the court circle of a little Saxon Duchy. In it we see how the Craft freed itself from the shackles of a dangerous and unmasonic rite, which threatened to destroy its usefulness and its appeal to our common humanity. In it we catch glimpses of that immortal figure who, amid the crowding duties of a busy life, gave of his time, his influence and his abounding talents, to advance the interests of that Order which he recognized as one of the most potent influences for good in his time.

After a hundred years of quiet development, during which the ritual, up till then practically the exclusive possession of the operative trade, was enriched in its symbolism and philosophy, purified in its literary form and rendered more dignified and stately in its ceremonial, Freemasonry revealed itself to the world at the beginning of the eighteenth century as a great spiritual system, with an infinite appeal to just and upright men of all races and creeds. It is not surprising, therefore,, that the fraternity spread with great rapidity over the civilized world, and that each nation selected, amid the kaleidoscopic variety, some plan that appealed to its particular mental attitude and political system. In England, the land of its origin, the ideal of brotherhood seems to have been the most highly prized contribution of Freemasonry. Hence it was that within the tyled temple, peer and artisan sat side by side, forgetful of the artificial barrier of race or caste. Hence

also rose those great Masonic charities which are the pride of the Craft and an inspiration to lovers of mankind over all the world.

On the Continent, where the blood-bought privileges of political and spiritual freedom had not yet been purchased, the lodge became the symbol of liberty of conscience. Here alone was it possible for men to give full expression of their ideas without the shadow of the prison or the gibbet darkening their assemblies. And in Germany, in particular, the study of the philosophy and symbolism of Freemasonry, even before the end of the eighteenth century, had already begun to occupy a great deal of attention.

It is then with a Masonic atmosphere of this kind that we have now to deal. The fundamentals are all here: the ritual, the "table lodge," or banquet, the virtue of charity, and added to them an enthusiasm for liberty of thought and an interest in the deeper significance of the usages of the Craft.

## **GOETHE A UNIVERSAL GENIUS**

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe is the great outstanding figure in German literature. Poet, dramatist, philosopher, scientist, statesman, he, more than any other modern man, is the type of the universal genius. It is no wonder then that German Freemasons point with pride to his connection with their Order, and that no German history of the Craft is complete without many references to his influence in promoting its interests in the Fatherland.

He was born in Frankfort on the Main, on the 28th of August, 1749, of parents of wealth, culture and social standing, and was intended for the law. He studied at Leipzig, his father's university, and at Strassburg, and on receiving his degree, returned home to practice his profession. But the humdrum of a legal career was ill-suited to his poetical temperament, and a few years later, he joined the court circle of the young Duke of Weimar, where he found his surroundings so congenial that he spent the rest of his life there, giving his services to his Prince, and at the same time producing that series of works in poetry and prose which have made for him a lasting memorial which will remain as long as literature is studied.

## **GOETHE WAS A MASON**

But it is not his life and writings, interesting as such a study is, that must occupy our attention at present. The story of his connection with the Ancient and Honorable Fraternity of Freemasons has been the theme of very many books and pamphlets and magazine articles, few, if any, of which, are available for English readers.

While still a young man he had learned something about Freemasonry, had become acquainted with distinguished members of its select circle, and had recognized the social and fraternal advantages which it offers. In his Poetry and Truth, he says: "The field of German intellectual and literary culture at the time presented the appearance of newly-

broken ground. Among business people there were far-sighted men on the lookout for skilful cultivators and prudent managers to till the unturned soil. Even the respected and well-established Freemason lodge, with whose most distinguished members I had become acquainted through my intimacy with Lili, found a fitting means of bringing me into touch with them; but, from a feeling of independence, which afterwards appeared to me madness, I declined all closer connection with them, not perceiving that these men, though forming a society of their own in a special sense, might yet do much to further my own ends, so nearly related to theirs." (1)

But this attitude of aloofness towards the Society did not long persist. Unlike his great contemporary and friend, the poet Wieland, who did not see Masonic light until he had reached the age of 76, Goethe had the advantages of membership early impressed upon him during a journey which he made with the young Duke of Weimar in the latter part of the year 1779. Many times during the four months of their tour, he realized that the entre of the lodges would have offered him opportunities of close acquaintance with men of weight and personal charm, opportunities which were not otherwise available. Accordingly, only three days after his return he began inquiries preliminary to presenting his petition to the local lodge. (2) But it was not until the 13th, February, that he addressed the following letter to Privy Councillor, J. F. von Fritsch, at that time Worshipful Master of Lodge Amalia:

"Your Excellency:

"I take the liberty of importuning you with a request. For a long time I have had occasion to wish that I might belong to the Society of Freemasons: this desire became very strong during our journey. It is only on this score that I have missed the opportunity of walking in closer union with persons whom I have learned to respect. It is the social feeling alone which leads me to seek for admission. To whom could I better entrust this matter, than to your Excellency? I await the kindly guidance of what you advise in this matter. I await, moreover, your gracious hints, and sign myself respectfully, Your Excellency's "Obedient servant, Goethe." (3)

The recipient of this letter, Privy Councillor, Baron Jakob Friedrich von Fritsch, was not very favorably disposed towards its acceptance. Six years previously, when the Duke had proposed appointing Goethe to a position in his cabinet, Fritsch had strenuously dissented, and had even presented his resignation from the council in protest, and although the charming manner and generous nature of the younger man soon won over his irascible and gruff colleague, the truce was only temporary. From time to time the eagerness and optimism of youth clashed with the conservatism of the middle aged Junker. No doubt this will account for the fact that four months passed before the desire expressed in his petition was gratified.

It so happened that there was then staying in Weimar probably the best qualified man in all Germany to advise Goethe before his admission and to guide his subsequent researches. Johann Joachim Christoph Bode, musician, teacher of languages, translator of, among other books, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and the publisher of several of Goethe's

works, was some twenty years older than Goethe. He was a deep student of Masonry and had accumulated a library of some eight hundred volumes covering the whole subject of secret societies, a remarkable achievement in those days. In recognition of his services to the Craft he had been elected, some years before this date, the Deputy Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Hamburg, which, then, as now, stood for pure, unadulterated Craft Masonry of three degrees. (4) It was to this man, whose honesty of purpose was so clearly seen, that Goethe applied for guidance, and it is a reasonable conclusion that for the remaining thirteen years of his life, Bode was one of Goethe's best Masonic advisers.

On the 23d of June, 1780, the eve of the Festival of [St. John the Baptist](#), the most important occasion of the German Masonic year, Goethe, then in his thirty-first year, was duly initiated in the Lodge Amalia in Weimar. He had previously made two unusual stipulations, first, that he should not be blindfolded, but that his word of honor to keep his eyes closed should be accepted instead, and secondly, that the ritual of the Grand Lodge of Hamburg should be substituted for that ordinarily in use in his lodge, which then followed the Rite of Strict Observance. (5) In the latter we probably see the influence of Bode, who occupied the chair during the ceremony. Fritsch, whose right it was to preside, was not fully reconciled to the admittance of the poet, and felt it impossible to take any part himself, in the initiation.

If Fritsch had been unfavorably disposed towards the candidate to begin with, the setting aside of the Strict Observance ritual, of which he was a staunch supporter, would not help in smoothing away the difficulties. This no doubt accounts for the fact that nearly a year elapsed without any move being made towards passing Goethe to the Fellowcraft Degree. Accordingly, on the 31st of March, 1781, he again addressed the Worshipful Master in the following letter:

"May I, your Excellency, on the near prospect of a lodge meeting, also urge my own small interest? While I submit myself to all the rules of the Order, though unknown to me, yet, I wish, if it be not contrary to regulations, to take a further step, in order that I might approach closer to the essentials. I desire this, not only on my own account, but also on account of the Brethren, who are frequently in the embarrassing position of having to treat me as a stranger. Should it be possible to advance me to the Master's degree at your convenience, I would learn of it most thankfully. The pains which I have given to the useful knowledge of the Order have, perhaps, rendered me not altogether unworthy of such a degree.

"However, I freely leave all to your Excellency's courteous discernment, and sign myself with unchanging esteem,

"Your Excellency's "Most obedient,

"Goethe." (6)

As a result of this petition he was passed to the Fellowcraft Degree on the eve of the festival, 23d June, 1781, the anniversary of his initiation. Lodge meetings were held

rather infrequently in those days, and nothing is known of Goethe's activity in Masonry, but it, is safe to conclude that he was present at the convocation held on the 5th of February, 1782, in which his princely friend, Carl August, Duke of Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach, or, as it is usually written, Duke of Weimar, was made a Mason. A month later, on the 3rd of March, they were both raised to the degree of a Master Mason. Shortly after, Goethe, as was the custom among members of Strict Observance lodges, proceeded to the degree of a Knight Templar.

Almost immediately after his entrance into Lodge Amalia, the Duke took his stand strongly in opposition to the rite of Strict Observance, and on the occasion of the next festival of St. John, a bitter discussion arose in open lodge. In this argument, the Worshipful Master Fritsch, an unwavering adherent of the old system, was supported by Bode and opposed by Friedrich Justin Bertuch, the Duke's secretary, and in his day an eminent and capable ruler of the Craft. The Convent of Wilhelmsbad, a Grand Lodge meeting which gave the death blow to the Strict Observance, had not yet been opened, but the feeling of dissatisfaction and unrest was, as we shall see, becoming every day more critical. The Master seems to have delivered an impassioned address in which he expressed his "disgust and weariness and, indignation at the innumerable errors, deceptions and frauds in the Masonic world, and his uncertainty as to which system one should follow." (7) Bertuch then presented a motion that "since in the present unrest, that peace, without which the ideals of the Institution must fail, cannot be preserved" the Lodge should "discontinue its work." (8)

In order to understand all this it is necessary to review, briefly, the rise, development and fall of this fantastic Masonic system which was then undermining the unity of European Freemasonry, and which, had it become dominant, would probably have destroyed the appeal and the usefulness of the Craft.

One of the many extraordinary excrescences which defaced the primitive simplicity of Freemasonry during the latter part of the eighteenth century was the Order of Strict Observance. The fundamental doctrine of this rite was that Freemasonry was derived from the Knights Templars. During the persecution which followed the suppression of the Order in 1307, its leaders, so ran the theory, under the disguise of Masons went over to Scotland where they carried on their ritualistic work and secured the continuance of their knighthood under the protection of the lodges of Operative Freemasons. The lodges of speculative Masons were therefor nothing more than Conclaves of Knights Templars under a different name, and the ceremonies there practiced were those which they had jealously guarded. It necessarily followed that, although the higher degrees of knighthood had been separated from the Craft degrees, in which in old time the operative brethren had been permitted to take part, every speculative Mason must be a Knight Templar. In order to emphasize this theory each member was designated as Eques, or knight, and was required to select an additional Latin appellation for himself, which was filed with the registrar. For instance, the leader of the system called himself "Eques ab Ense," knight of the sword. But the crowning glory of the system was the fiction that the supreme government was in the hands of men of high Masonic rank and social and political

distinction. Who these leaders were, no one was allowed to know. They were called "the Unknown Superiors," and their commands were to be implicitly obeyed.

The originator of this rite was a German nobleman, Karl Gotthelf, Baron von Hund and Altengrotkau, a man of a childlike simplicity and credulity, and according to some of his biographers, of inordinate vanity. One might also be justified in suspecting that he was also characterized by a judgment somewhat lacking in strength and common sense. He received his higher degrees in the Chapter of Clermont, which was held in Paris in 1754 for the purpose of reorganizing the Craft. Not long after he elaborated his system, which had an extraordinary vogue in Germany for more than half a century. The Fraternity seems to have been torn with dissensions; the more conservative members wished to retain the ancient simplicity of ritual and tradition which had come to them from England, while the Modernists longed for the spectacular innovations and aristocratic doctrines of the new system. It was this struggle which led to the suspension of the work in Lodge Amalia for twenty-six years, and which, on its happy reorganization in 1808, made it impossible for their old Worshipful Master, Fritsch, to wield the gavel once more.

Long before this, however, the founder of the system, von Hund, had met his Waterloo. Charged, at the Congress of 1775 to reveal the names of the "Unknown Superiors," and to produce his documentary evidence of Masonic rank, he was unable to give satisfactory answers. He was consequently discredited, his order divided and he died in the following year. (9)

## **GOETHE RETAINED HIS INTEREST**

During the twenty-six years in which the lodge was dormant, neither Goethe nor the Duke lost their interest in Freemasonry. But the times were not yet propitious for the resumption of the work. It was necessary first that the host of charlatans, alchemists, spiritists and the rest, who had invaded the Order, and reduced it to the low condition in which it then was, must be cleared out, and the eagerness for the higher degrees brought within reasonable bounds.

On the 14th of October, 1806, was fought the battle of Jena, and Napoleon's victorious armies commenced their march into Germany. Under these distressing circumstances, the Freemasons of Jena felt that the ministrations of the brotherhood would be of the greatest comfort and efficacy in "dissipating the dark clouds which surrounded them." In response to their petition to be allowed to found a new lodge, Goethe was appointed by the Duke to his first commission as a Masonic statesman. After due consideration of the case, he gave as his advice that Jena was not the place nor that year the time for renewed Masonic activities.

But a pleasanter task was soon to be his. A few months later conditions had sufficiently improved to warrant a consideration of the possibility of reopening Lodge Amalia. Accordingly, in April, 1808, the Duke appointed Goethe, Bertuch and seven others a commission to undertake the preliminary steps.

It was a fortunate circumstance that a very distinguished ritualism and high-souled Mason, Friedrich Ludwig Schroeder, the author of a famous system of Masonry which bore his name, was at that very time at Weimar with the purpose of laying his plan before Goethe, as the highest arbiter in all literary matters. The poet, who had always been opposed to the claims of the higher degrees, as he knew them, was favorably impressed with the simplicity and directness of the new ritual. He therefore strongly recommended it to the Duke, at whose command he wrote the following letter to the Lodge Gunther of the Standing Lions, at Rudolstadt, which was working under the Grand Lodge of Hamburg:

"Time and circumstances caused us in 1782 to discontinue the work of our Lodge Amalia and to allow it to stand idle till now. Time and circumstances now cause us to open our Lodge Amalia once more, and once more there to renew our labors. In this we, as Masons, have not been idle. We have observed, in the world of nature and of men, the spirit of the time, and the results of its operation in the progress of Masonry towards its perfection, and, though without lodge connection, we have endeavored, as far as it was possible for us, to fulfill in truth, our Masonic obligation. In the meantime we have accumulated a great deal of experience and valuable enlightenment concerning the aims and character of our Order. These facts have influenced us to decide to discontinue the System of Strict Observance, for a long time in use in the Lodge Amalia, as it is no longer useful, and to accept that of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Lower Saxony at Hamburg, under which you also work. This system is much more purified, more suitable, and corresponds better with the spirit of our time and knowledge. We have also decided to unite ourselves with the aforesaid Provincial Grand Lodge. Not only have the Worshipful Master and brethren of the Lodge Amalia signed with me, but also other brethren who live here, and still others who have united with us in the reopening of the Lodge Amalia according to the above system. All this is done with the highest approbation of our revered and august brother, Carl August, our beloved Duke and governor." (10)

Presumably this letter was intended to be an application for the consent of the lodge at Rudolstadt, and it would seem that such consent was forthcoming, for the work of reorganization was carried through.

It was Goethe's wish that they should re-elect Fritsch, the Worshipful Master of the lodge, before its suspension, but the loyalty of that unbending man to the now thoroughly discredited System of Strict Observance did not waver and he would not consent to submit to a system which sought to trace the origin of the Craft to a society of humble artisans, instead of the aristocratic, medieval Knights Templar. Accordingly, at the reorganization meeting on the 27th of June, 1808, Bertuch was elected Worshipful Master. The election, however, was not, unanimous, for the ballots showed that a substantial minority wished to place Goethe in the Master's chair.

On the 24th of October the lodge was at length successfully started upon its new career, and it remains to this day, using the same ritual, and proud of the illustrious name so closely connected with this critical period of its history. Unfortunately, the poet, who was

that year under treatment for the gout, was unable to be present. The seventeen charter members were all officials of the little court of Weimar, and five of them close personal friends of Goethe, a fact which attests their culture and ability and congeniality. Pietsch, in his little book on Goethe's centennial, adds enthusiastically, "and what a lodge!"

## **GOETHE IS ASKED TO BECOME MASTER**

The remainder of Goethe's Masonic career is simply told. He attended the meetings but rarely, and as time passed his visits were at longer intervals. He never held office, and yet his influence among the brethren was great for two years later. When the little lodge had increased in numbers to fifty, Bertuch felt constrained to lay down the gavel and Goethe was elected to the chair, but the pressure of public business had become so very great that it would have been impossible for him to have undertaken the responsibility, and he was unable to accept the position. IN fact, so little time had he for the lodge business that he felt constrained to apply for a demit, which he did in the following letter, dated 5th, October, 1812, addressed to Bertuch's successor Ridel:

"Your honor would do me an especial favour if you would took upon my absence as being regular, and not unMasonic, and could release me from my obligations to the society. I would unwillingly relinquish entirely this honorable and interesting connection, but it is impossible for me to attend lodge regularly, and I do not wish to set a bad example by my absence. Perhaps I may learn the particulars by word of mouth, until which time I shall reserve my apology." (11)

This, however, did not sever his connection with the lodge, and probably the resignation was not accepted nor the demit granted.

The last occasion on which Goethe was present at the regular work of the lodge was on the 5th of December, 1815, when he had the satisfaction of seeing his only son, Julius August Walther, made a Mason. The young man was then twenty-six and his father sixty-five and although the subsequent career of August Goethe was a source of anxiety and sorrow to the poet, his membership was a great advantage to Lodge Amalia. He became an enthusiastic Mason, was elected Junior Steward, which office he held until his death in 1830, and constantly acted as an intermediary between the lodge and his father. Possibly a good deal of Goethe's assistance in the interests of the lodge was due to his desire to further the advancement of his son.

One cannot help feeling at times that, in their desire to exalt the dignified standing of the Order, the German historians have rather over-emphasized Goethe's interest in the Craft. A biographer who could speak of him as "the greatest poet of all time" (12), or as one who had lived "perhaps the richest and most beautiful life that has ever been vouchsafed to any mortal" (13), might easily be so misled by his enthusiasm for Freemasonry and for his hero as to exaggerate the position the one held in the heart of the other. Indeed, some of their own historians apparently take this view. Kneisner, in his History of German Freemasonry, says: "Goethe had not often visited the lodge, and took no part in its meetings when it wag reopened." (14)

And yet we have the testimony, not only of the historians, but also of his Masonic contemporaries, that his interest was deep and lasting. "Although he never held office he was, and continued to be until his advanced age, the spiritual centre of the Lodge Amalia." (14) Or as Pietsch expresses it, "he was the centre of crystallization of his beloved lodge." We are also told by Pietsch that, whenever possible, he attended the meetings of the "Historical Select Union." This was an inner circle, restricted to Master Masons and devoted to a study of the history, symbolism and philosophy of the Order. The originator of the rite had designed the Union in the hope, which was abundantly justified, that with the opportunity of gaining accurate Masonic knowledge, the desire for higher degrees would be less imperative. Shortly after the reopening of the lodge a Select Union had been attached to the Lodge Amalia. This was in 1810. That these opportunities for gaining an understanding of the fundamentals of Freemasonry were not lost by Goethe is claimed by Caspari, who says, "Goethe, like Lessing, comprehended the potential depth of the Masonic life. He had a presentiment that here a great evangel would be preached, that must become world-wide, if only it could be separated from the dross." (15)

The most definite statement of his Masonic activities was made at a service held in the lodge in commemoration of his death, at which the Worshipful Master, K. W. von Fritsch, the son of the previous Master of the name, stated that "at every important event, at every great celebration of the lodge, he had taken so active a part that all the more important addresses, songs and general arrangements had the advantage of his previous examination and approval." (16)

It is important, in our study of Goethe's Masonic life, to refer to some of these undertakings. In 1813, his friend and fellow poet, and brother in the Craft, Wieland, passed on to "the Eternal East," and Goethe undertook to prepare the funeral oration, "To the Fraternal Memory of Wieland." That this was considered a Masonic duty is shown by the fact that before he delivered it standing beside the sarcophagus of his departed friend, it had been sent for examination and approval to the Worshipful Master of the Lodge, Ridel.

In 1821 the then Worshipful Master of the Lodge, Ridel, died, and his memory, and that of four other brethren who had passed home before him, was the object of a Lodge of Sorrow, which was held on the 15th of June. The oration delivered upon this occasion seemed of sufficient value to be printed, and Goethe undertook the responsibility of writing an introduction. In it he says that the distinguishing characteristics of the Order "lead us to renounce our particular ambitions and to consider higher and universal aims," and that the Lodge of Sorrow is the place "where this distinguished life as well as the undistinguished appears in its individuality; where we see examples for ourselves in the departed."

On the 23rd of June, 1830, the lodge celebrated the jubilee of his admittance into Masonry. The previous day a delegation had called upon him with a diploma of honorary membership and invited him to attend the meeting, but his advanced age, he was then approaching his 81st birthday, made it impossible to be present in person.

However, he composed a short poem for the occasion, and this is naturally very highly prized by the Lodge Amalia. Its literary merits are, it must be admitted, not very high, but it stands with Burns' famous "Farewell to Torbolton," as among the few poems which have been dedicated to Masonic lodges by poets of the first rank. It may be translated rather freely as follows:

"Fifty years have passed forever,  
Like a few days they have flown,  
Fifty years, returning never,  
From the earnest, dim unknown.  
"Yet a living, high endeavor  
Shows itself forever new.  
Love of friends that naught can sever,  
Human worth, forever true.  
"And our bond of union, surer  
As the years pass, widely spread,  
Gently shine with light e'er purer,  
Like the faint stars overhead.  
"Let us then in happy union,  
Honoring humanity,  
Firmly stand in true communion,  
As of old it used to be."

His pleasure at the honor done him by his mother lodge was expressed in a letter which he wrote about three weeks after to his friend and Brother Zelter, a well-known musician of the time. He writes: "It is quite pleasing that you have celebrated your Masonic jubilee at the same time as mine. On the eve of St. John's festival I was a member of the Order for fifty years. The gentlemen have managed these epochs with the greatest courtesy, and on the next day I replied in a friendly manner to their sentiments." (17)

## **MASONRY IN GOETHE'S WRITINGS**

Goethe's Masonic studies are mirrored in his writings. The varied and fascinating by-paths of forgotten lore along which one is led when studying the history and symbolism of the Craft, could not fail to attract the mind of the poet. Indeed, it has been suggested by one of his biographers that his interest in studies of this kind was one of the main reasons why he was first attracted to Masonry. "It is in line with Goethe's inclination towards the symbolical as it is revealed in the Mysteries, though also with sociable considerations, that he became a Freemason." (18) While this may be true, it is clear that the evidences of his Masonic membership are numerous and distinct. "After he became a member of the Society, he accomplished no great work which did not ring in Masonic accord, he completed nothing which did not lead back to a Masonic origin." Although this statement of Pietsch's may be exaggerated, it is a well-known fact that all through his works, both prose and poetry, there are numerous references to Freemasonry. These have been

carefully brought together and collated. Indeed, a study of them would require a volume of respectable size for any adequate presentation.

Many of Goethe's songs are made use of by the lodges, and practically everyone of their song-books contains a beautiful lyric, the first verse of which runs:

"In all such pleasant weather,  
When flushed by love and wine,  
This song we'll sing together,  
And hand to hand entwine.  
May God keep us united,  
Who us hath higher led,  
The love-flames he had lighted,  
Be by our friendship fed." (19)

But this was written several years before he entered the Society, and consequently has no distinctively Masonic reference.

The song which is best known to English-speaking readers as being most definitely a Craft poem is called "The Masons' Lodge," and has been translated by Carlyle. It has been already published in THE BUILDER, and so only the first stanza need be quoted:

"The Mason's ways are  
A type of existence,  
And his persistence,  
Is as the days are  
Of men in this world." (20)

## **MASONIC GREATNESS LIES IN MASONIC SERVICE**

Wherein does Masonic eminence consist? It is not in the accumulation of degrees, interesting as these may be. It is not in the receipt of honors, nor the holding of exalted rank, though to serve the Craft with distinction is a privilege to be coveted by all good men. It is not even the attainment of scholarship, though a knowledge of Masonic philosophy cannot fail to have its effect in up building character. It is not any of these that can place a man in the proud position of being a Mason in the fullest and completest sense. It is to exemplify in one's dealings with mankind those virtues of charity, of kindness, of tolerance which the Ritual so forcefully inculcates by precept and by symbol. It is to be a brother, not only to the household of the faithful, but to every man, irrespective of color or creed or race, whom economic conditions, or ignorance, or unfavorable heredity and environment have reduced to those depths from whence he can be rescued only by the fraternal assistance of those more favorably situated. Judged by

these criteria, Goethe seems to have shown himself a real Freemason in his dealings with his fellow men. To quote Pietsch again: "Not only in the lodge did Goethe reveal himself as a perfect Freemason, but also he knew, as no other man did, how to sustain the Masonic ideal in the outer world, and to reveal it in all departments of spiritual culture and practical life." He was always ready to help those in distress, and that his benefactions flowed from the goodness of his heart is shown by the unostentatious way in which he bestowed them. "To his prince and the country, to a share in whose government he had been called, he was the truest and most energetic servant; to his friends, the most devoted friend; to his parents, the best and most lovable child, and to his son the fondest father." (21)

It is clear, then, that the great heart of the poet ever beat true to the guiding principles of the Craft; that his interest though not evidenced by regular attendance, was still profound and lasting, and that it is with no unjustifiable pride that German Masonic historians refer to his name as the most illustrious on their register. A society that numbers among its membership such famous men as Lessing, Wieland, Mozart, Haydn and Fichte can justly claim the respect of all thinking men, but brighter than all these shines the unquenchable light of Goethe.

## **Goethe, Freemason**

Germany celebrates this year the Centennial of the death of her greatest man of letters, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, as the United States celebrates the bicentennial of the birth of George Washington, her greatest General, Statesman and President.

Both were Freemasons!

It is a continual puzzle to Masons, why Washington's biographers so seldom - almost never - mention either his Masonic correspondence, membership and Mastership; or the tremendous, if quiet, influence which Freemasonry had upon his life, character and activities. The same puzzle exists about the biographers of the great Germany Poet. To an interested and understanding Freemason, his works are replete with Masonic allusions; some of them obviously inspired by Masonic teachings. To the Profane, this influence may be non-existent; perhaps it is because so few of the passionate admirers of the great German - who have sung the ever-increasing chorus of praise for his life and labors - have been Masons, and therefore the majority have no background of Craft understanding.

Many of his biographers put great stress upon his stay in Strassburg and his studies of Gothic Architecture, particularly under the tutelage of the great thinker, Herder, who is credited with inspiring Goethe with his love - even his veneration - for Gothic buildings. Freemasons will see in his stay in Strassburg, where the great Gothic minister dominated his thought with its beauty, the progenitor of that desire to know more of the Craft which had built it - a desire to be gratified when he was thirty-one years of age. He was initiated

in Lodge Amalia, at Weimar (where he lived most of his life and where he died) on the eve of the Feast of St. John the Baptist, in 1780.

Just how or why he became a Mason we do not know; neither can we know much of what impression his initiation made upon him. For it must not be supposed that the Masonry practiced then by the Lodge Amalia was the Masonry we know; although doubtless it held some of our essentials.

The Lodge at Weimar was then under the "Rite of Strict Observance," that curious compound of politics, religion and Knights Templarism. Of this Rite, Mackey says:

"The Rite of Strict Observance" was a modification of Freemasonry, based on the Order of Knights Templar, and introduced into Germany in 1754 by its founder, the Baron von Hund. It was divided into the following seven degrees: 1. Apprentice; 2. Fellow Craft; 3. Master; 4. Scottish Master; 5. Novice; 6. Templar, and 7. Professed Knight. According to the system of the founder of this Rite, upon the death of Jacques de Molay, the Grand Master of the Templars, Pierre d' Aumont, the Provincial Grand Master of Auvergne, with two Commanders and five Knights retired for purposes of safety into Scotland, which place they reached disguised as Operative Masons, and there finding the Grand Commander, George Harris, and several Knights, they determined to continue the Order. Aumont was nominated Grand Master at a Chapter held on St. John's Day 1313. To avoid persecution the Knights became Freemasons. In 1361, the Grand Master of the Temple removed his seat to Old Aberdeen, and from that time the Order under the veil of Freemasonry, spread rapidly through France, Germany, Spain, Portugal and elsewhere. These events constituted the principal subject of many of the Degrees of the Rite of Strict Observance. The others were connected with alchemy, magic, and other superstitious practices. The great doctrine contended for by the followers of this Rite was, that every true Mason is a Knight Templar."

The seeds of death were sown in the Strict Observance by its very fundamental - that the "Unknown Superiors" supposed to be at its head, would communicate valued esoteric, not to say occult, secrets to its initiates. Obviously, no such secrets were ever communicated, and on the truth of history vanquishing the fiction that Strict Observance was really connected with the Order of Chivalry, the Rite died.

Luckily for Goethe's feeling for the Ancient Craft (?) had the advantage of a great admiration for Lessing - indeed, for all we know to the contrary, it may have been Lessing's love for Freemasonry which first led Goethe to seek the light. Goethe was far too broad-minded a man, and much too deep a thinker, to condemn all that he found good in the Lodge at Weimar, merely because it dropped from under his feet almost as he secured a foothold!

Two years after Goethe's initiation, the Rite of Observance received its death blow, and Frederich Ludwig Schroeder, one of Germany's greatest actors and an ardent Freemason, brought his influence to bear upon German Freemasonry. Dissatisfied then (as thousands of devoted Freemasons are dissatisfied today when any one attempts to "improve" upon

ritual or doctrine) Schroeder, as Master of Lodge Emanuel at Hamburg, resolved to attempt to complete reformation of Masonry in Germany; to rid it of all its corruptions, "advanced" degrees, spurious Rites and fantastic "side orders," founded on alchemy, Rosicrucianism, Hermetic philosophy; even upon magic and mysticism.

His theory was that, despite the traditions of the Steinmetzen, Freemasonry had begun in Gothic England and spread to the continent. According to his belief, the English Book of Constitutions and the English Ritual held the only pure Freemasonry. Securing a copy of "Jachin and Boaz," Shroeder translated it and made it the foundation of that which speedily became known as Shroeder's Rite or Shroeder's System. It was adopted by the Provincial Grand Lodge in 1801 and, later, by many other German Lodges. The Hamburg Grand Lodge, under which Lodge Amalia now holds, still works according to this system. (How the "Gentlemen belonging to the Jeruselam lodge" who wrote the pamphlet, would have turned in his grave had he known how his famous expose was to be used!)

Otto Caspari, historian, Goethe admirer and Masonic enthusiast, couples Goethe and Schroeder in the change of the working of Lodge Amalia. He says:

"Frederich Ludwig Schroeder was the man who, meantime, made his appearance as the reformer of Freemasonry. He also went to Weimar and succeeded in persuading Goethe and the Duke Carl Augustus to take an interest in his system. Amalia Lodge accepted Schroeder's system and in 1808 opened its Temple again."

"Jachin and Boaz" may be found in any good Masonic Library. The modern Freemason will miss much that he knows in its pages, and find much that he does not know as Masonry; but he will see that many essential Masonic principles are therein set forth.

Goethe remained a member of Amalia Lodge to the day of his death. What was to him the "new system" must have made a far greater appeal than the Rite of Strict Observance. Shortened, abbreviated, scanty as is the Masonry set forth in "Jachin and Boaz," to us who are heir of the rich ritual and symbolism of Preston, Oliver, Desaugliers et al; it is yet Masonic, which the Strict Observance can hardly be considered to be in the light by which we moderns see. At any rate, Goethe embraced the Schroeder system as the real and Ancient Freemasonry, and it was this which influenced both his life and his writings.

Because Goethe was a follower of Spinoza, ignorant fanatics have falsely accused him of atheism; a charge as ridiculous as it is unfounded. No one today finds Spinoza atheistic; no one ever read Goethe to find anything but a humble man marveling at the greatness of a nature he could not comprehend. Goethe stands awestruck before creation; his characters are often blinded by the magnificence of the cosmos. Goethe revered the Bible; merely because he could not accept the narrow definition of God and heaven which were the professions of his time, he has been thought by the ignorant to have denied the God all his works praise by their spirit of reverence for nature and its miracles.

Throughout the works of this greatest of German poets - a genius so stupendous that he is not infrequently bracketed with Shakespeare - are countless Masonic thoughts, ideas, references and allusions. Some of these, like those found in Kipling, are evidently conscious and intentional. Others - and these the Masonic student of Goethe loves best - are as evidently without intent; they are but the breathing into poem or drama of those ideas of life, death, hereafter, moral principles and ethical doctrine, which, inculcated by Freemasonry, were a part of Goethe's life.

To English speaking Masons Goethe's best known Masonic work is the short poem "Masonic Lodge." It can be found in any collection of Goethe's works, and in Volume Twenty of the Little Masonic Library. It is given in full here, not only for purposes of short discussion, but because, by some unaccountable and distressing error, the first five lines, which are the keynote of the whole poem, are omitted in the (1929) Clegg edition of Mackey's Encyclopedia.

The Masons's ways are A Type of Existence  
And his persistence Is as the days are  
Of men in this world. The future hides it

Gladness and Sorrow, We press still thorow,  
Naught that abides in it Daunting us - onward.  
And Solemn before us Veiled, the dark portal,

Goal of all mortal; Stars are silent o'er us  
Graves under us silent. While earnest thou gazest  
Comes boding of terror, Comes phantasm and error

Perplexes the bravest With doubt and misgiving.  
But heard are the voices - Heard are the Sages,  
The Worlds and the Ages; "Choose well; your choice is

"Brief and yet endless; "Here eyes do regard you  
"In eternity's stillness; "Here is all fullness,  
"Ye have to reward you, "Work, and despair not."

The word "thorow (first stanza) is an obsolete variant of thorough meaning "through", "forward," "ahead," or "onward."

No short poem could more beautifully express the Masonic legend and doctrine; of continuity from "time immemorial;" of hope so great that though we ascend the Winding Stair of life without knowing whether gladness or sorrow are hidden in the future, still we climb, pressing ever onward, undaunted; of the terror and fear of the "grim tyrant," the voiceless grave, the unrevealed mystery; of the comfort and hope of the immortal voices from sage, experience, history and nature; of those "eyes" which "regard you" from beyond - does not Freemasonry teach of an All Seeing Eye? - of that "all fullness" of the

future which is ours if we "choose well" - choice brief as a moment, result endless as eternity! And finally, that courageous, inspiring closing admonition - "work" - and despair not!"

It is impossible to compress the mighty allegorical drama of Faust into a paragraph as to do the same for Hamlet. Goethe did not invent the character of Faust, nor did the legend of his "selling himself to the devil." Faust was an actual historical character, a "scoundrelly magician and astrologer" about whom many legends clustered. In 1587, Faust appears as the hero of a popular book in the pride of his strength and knowledge. He sells his soul to the devil in return for a life of pleasure, luxury and gratification of desire on earth. Goethe added to the old legend a tender and tragic love story and wove into it a philosophic content entirely foreign to the material which began as an old wives tale, expanded into a plot for puppet shows, and finally became a popular book. He makes of Faust a student and a thinker, but also a man, with all of man's desires. Mephistopheles is the wile and specious tempter; Margaret is part of the bait. Throughout the tragedy the struggle for ascendancy between good and evil is made manifest, just as in the Masonic drama. It is here that the keen student of Freemasonry and the lover of Goethe finds so many contacts between mind of the poet and teachings of Freemasonry. As in the Legend of Hiram Abif, Faust at last finds that evil may not forever strive successfully with good; his final and greatest satisfaction is not in selfish pleasure, which means death for the soul, but in work for humanity.

Difference of language, of Rite, and of age; make Masonic parallels in Goethe's works and the story and ritual we know, anything but literal. Such a study of an author is not for the literal minded. To read Goethe literally is on a par with scanning Hamlet's soliloquy for knowledge of the physical phenomena of sleep! To discuss the Legend of Hiram Abif from a literal standpoint is wholly to miss its significance and its beauty. Goethe makes of his great character an allegory; allegorically, Faust and Hiram are not unlike. Though one first resists while the other first yields to severe temptation, in the end the same lesson is taught by both - that truth overcomes error and evil, and that the divine is always within humanity do we but seek far enough.

However, it is not only in Faust, the greatest of his works, that the interested Freemason will find the influence of the gentle Craft upon the great German poet. Wilhelm Meister's progress is through what may be called a series of Apprenticeships (at least they are periods of learning) to a stage of "further light" in which he learns that only by reverence for God, man and self can a firm character foundation be builded. Werther, Edmont and Gotz von Berlichingen, are all exemplars of the poet's concern for inner spiritual freedom. Iphigenia denies the traditional barriers of race and religion, just as does Freemasonry today (and has ever since the Mother Grand Lodge of 1717). Both poet and Fraternity contend for the right of the individual to erect his own spiritual plumb line, as told by Amos of the Jehovah of old who said, "I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel, I will not again pass by them any more." In Tasso. the hero is seriously threatened with political and social powers but overcomes them by faith in the God-given powers within him. It may be argued that as these themes of poets and playwrights of all ages, there is no more reason for ascribing a Masonic origin for them in Goethe's works,

than to reason that Shakespeare must have been a Mason because in many of his plays truth overcomes error, wrong is supine against right and virtue triumphant over evil.

The difference is that we know Goethe to have been an interested, thoughtful and zealous Freemason; Lodge Amalia celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of his initiation with the aged but still vigorous poet taking part in the celebration. Of this important event in Goethe's life, Brother Otto Caspari has beautifully written: "On to old age he remained the intellectual center of Amalia Lodge. It was a sacred and hallowed day when Goethe celebrated his fiftieth anniversary in the Temple Weimar. There he stood, the great and venerable poet, who had lived to see so much - the symbol of true and pure human love, no hypocrite, openly confessing his human weaknesses, but relying on his noble, good and imperishable heart, or which it has been said Goethe's heart, which but few people knew, was as great as his intellect, which everybody knows.

"It must have been an impressive moment, when the grand old Mason, after receiving numerous ovations, responded by citing that Masonic poem which shows us clearly how he, an aged man, had retained eternal youth and love in his heart. He praised Freemasonry as the sublime and everlasting union of humanity." The greatest of men have to die; Goethe was called to the Celestial Lodge above on March 22, 1832.

Pathetically, yet most beautifully, his last words were Masonic - Masonic in the language of the Craft of all Freemasons of all lands and all Rites know. Perhaps this cry was but a physical craving for increased illumination as his eyes failed him. But thinking of his life, and the stupendous gifts he made to mankind, the urge to learn, to know, to reach out into the unknown for the solution of all mystery, which breathes through many of his poems and dramas, it is difficult to think of them except as symbolic of the man, his works, his Freemasonry and his character.

*With his last breath, Goethe cried the immortal phrase "More Light!"*

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