



LODGE VEGAS # 32

MYSTIC TIE

That sacred and inviolable bond which unites men of the most discordant opinions into one band of brothers, which gives but one language to men of all nations and one altar to men of all religions, is properly, from the mysterious influence it exerts, denominated the mystic tie; and Freemasons, because they alone are under its influence, or enjoy its benefits, are called "Brethren of the Mystic Tie."

The expression was used by Brother Robert Burns in his farewell to the Brethren of Saint James Lodge, Tarbolton, Scotland,

Adieu! a heart-warm, fond adieu!
Dear Brothers of the mystic tie!
Ye favored, ye enlightened few,

Companions of my social joy! "The moral solidarity of mankind is dissolved. The danger is imminent that the end may be a war of all against all. Sects and parties are increasing; common estimates and ideals keep slipping away; we understand one another less and less; even voluntary associations, that form of unity peculiar to modern times, unite more in accomplishment than disposition, bring men together outwardly rather than in reality."

These words, written by Rudolph Eucken in 1912, were like a star-shell over No Man's Land, revealing the divided mind of the world, and they had a terrible fulfilment. The War, by its principle of violence, made no positive contribution to society, but only stirred up and brought to the surface what already existed. For both men and nations it intensified tendencies already active, precipitated passions held in obscure solution, and brought to a focus forces that had long been uneasily accumulating. It neither initiated nor changed the direction in which the world was moving, but it did quicken the pace, and, in quickening it, revealed it. That is why a haunting uneasiness possesses the minds of men today. Even when local disturbances subside and isolated disputes are settled, we still doubt whether a stable tranquillity has returned or ever will return again. For these things are only symptoms of a profound and widespread mental ferment and moral restlessness.

The insight of Eucken goes further back and deeper down to the real root of the matter, divining the causes and logic of it all to be moral, spiritual, religious. For, if anything is made plain by history, it is that the mystic tie which holds humanity together in ordered and advancing life is moral and spiritual, and when that thread is cut anything may happen. From the beginning of the

century the spiritual disintegration of the modern world, the breaking of the ties that bind together the fabric of civilization, had been observed and noted by many. Faith grew dim, moral sanctions were relaxed, and it was deemed clever and smart to talk lightly of those sanctities without which no society has long existed. Much of our literature has been intellectually Bolshevistic for thirty years, attacking the basis of marriage, of the home, of the church, of the state, as if the moral laws were only conventions, if not fictions. Verily we have our reward; we know now that when fools play with fire they get burned.

For a time, during the stress and strain and terror of the war, there seemed to be a reknitting of the ties that bind men and nations together; but it was only seeming. It was the power of fear and force, not the power of faith. How unreal, how artificial it was is shown by the rapidity with which that amazing solidarity was demobilized, to be followed by a revival of class rancor, sectarian ardor, and a narrow, myopic nationalism. A world which, having sent young men to die by the thousands for magnanimous ideals, has already half forgotten them as it coolly and briskly resumes business at the old stand - such a world may be grieved, but it ought not to be astonished, at the revolt of both the minds and souls of men. Not that the immediate future will see a triumph of subversive schemes and radical ideas. If we follow an almost universal precedent we shall pass first through a period of luxury and extravagance, and there will be a momentary craving for the old social and religious orders, as in the years following the Napoleonic Wars. But this is not significant. It is merely the first reaction from the emotional strain and nervous tension of the war. This mood will soon spend itself, and then, at once, new forms, new forces, new demands will begin to arise which will sweep away much that has seemed precious and permanent in our lives.

Without a spiritual renewal, without a reknitting of that "moral solidarity," of which Eucken speaks so eloquently, - without the Mystic Tie - we may not hope for security and real progress. The truth is that we have been trying to build a human civilization on a materialistic foundation, and it cannot be done. No human community can long exist on such a basis. Russia has rendered incalculable service to humanity, by showing, with deadly consistency, how materialism issues into anarchy and animalism. Hear now a proof of this in the words of a spiritually-minded man who lived in the midst of it, watching the decay and destruction of his country. Eugene Troubetzkoy, Professor of Law in the University of Moscow, in the Hibbert Journal, for January, 1920, shows us what happens when the tie of spiritual faith and fellowship is broken. Here are words which he who runs may read:

"Bolshevism is first and foremost the practical denial of the spiritual. They flatly refuse to admit the existence of any spiritual bond between man and man. For them economic and material interests constitute the only social nexus; they recognize no other. This is the source of their whole conception of human society. The love of country, for example, is a lying hypocritical pretence; for the national bond is a spiritual bond, and therefore wholly factitious. From their point of view the only real bond between men is the material - that is to say, the economic. Material interests divide men into classes, and they are the only divisions to be taken account of. Hence they recognize no Nations save the Rich and the Poor. As there is no other bond which can unite these two Nations into one social whole, their relations must be regulated exclusively by the zoological principle revealed in the struggle for existence.

The materialistic conception of society is the Bolshevik method of treating the family. Since there is no spiritual bond between the sexes, there can be no constant relation. The rule is therefore that men and women can change their partners as often as they wish. The authorities in certain districts have even proclaimed the 'nationalisation' of women, that is, the abolition of any private and exclusive right to possess a wife even for a limited period, on the ground that women are the property of all. The same children. A powerful current of opinion is urging that children must be taken from their parents in order that the State may give them an education on true materialistic lines. In certain communes some hundreds of children were 'nationalised,' that is, 'taken from their parents and placed in public institutions.'

There it is, showing us what the red logic of hell means when it works itself out in action, and what results follow when the Mystic Tie of spiritual faith and fellowship is cut. Political anarchy, social animalism, moral bedlam follow with mathematical certainty, and all the fine and holy things of life are thrown into the junk heap. Man has an animal inheritance - moods of ape and tiger mingle in him with divine dreams and thoughts that wander through eternity - and when the Divine is denied, he reverts to the law of the jungle, and the hard-won trophy of spiritual struggle and agony vanishes. What happens, happens again. The Bolsheviks are men of like passions as ourselves; they simply carry out with the fatal logic of fanaticism the dogma of materialism upon which we have been trying to base our modern civilization. If anyone thinks that what has taken place in Russia cannot happen in America, he knows little of history and less of human nature. The practical denial of the Divine dehumanizes humanity, and the rest follows as night follows day.

For that reason, if it should be a part of our religion to be patriotic, it must be a part of our patriotism to keep the light of spiritual faith aflame on the altars built by our fathers. Down in Wales, at a time when it seemed that revolution was inevitable, I asked a labour leader what bond held men together. He said: "All that holds these men back is the fact that they were trained in the Sunday-schools of these Welsh chapels years ago. That is all that keeps the spark from blowing up." Within the last four years ten thousand Sunday-schools have ceased to exist in America, and the end is not yet. Facts such as these, and others of like kind, make a thoughtful man wonder as to what the future will be. What confronts us is not specifically indifference to religion, but indifference to pretty well everything outside the circle of creature comfort and self-gratification. There are many exceptions, of course, but in the main it is true that society has as yet been able to persuade only a few of its members to be really interested in its higher concerns. By the same token, men who do care for what is finest in our national life must make use of every opportunity, every instrumentality, to keep alive the faith that makes men faithful, and the vision of the moral ideal that lights our human way toward the city of God.

There is no need to apply what has been said, least of all to men to whom the Mystic Tie is a reality, and who are bound together by it in a fraternity of spiritual Faith and Fellowship. In every degree of Freemasonry we are taught - by art, by drama, by symbol - the moral basis of human society, its spiritual interpretation, and the necessity of a fraternal righteousness among men, without which manhood is rudimentary and intellectual culture is the slave of greed and passion. Of Lincoln it was said, that "his practical life was spiritual," and by as much as Masonry builds men of like faith and fibre who, in private life and public service, keep a manhood neither bought nor sold, true of heart and unbefogged of mind, it is helping to weave that Mystic Tie that holds the republic together. The words of James Bryce, in "The American Commonwealth," ought to be written and hung up in our hearts:

"If history teaches anything, it teaches us that hitherto civilized society has rested on religion. It was religious zeal and religious conscience that led to the founding of the New England colonies two centuries and a half ago. Religion and conscience have been a constantly active force in the American Commonwealth ever since. And the more democratic republics become, the more the masses grow conscious of their power, the more do they need to live not only by patriotism, but by reverence and self-control, and the more essential to their well-being are those sources from which reverence and self-control flow."

By Bro. Joseph Fort Newton, New York
- Source: *The Builder* - June - 1920
- Source: Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry

THE NORTHEAST CORNER

Surely no Mason ever forgets the moment when he is placed in the Northeast Corner of the Lodge, and hears the Master say, that he there stands a just and upright Mason. It is one of the thrills

along the great journey of initiation, a point at which the idea and purpose of Masonry begin to take shape in the mind.

A thrill of joy is felt in the Lodge, not only by the initiate but by the Master and the Brethren, as if a son had been born, or a new friend found; a note of exaltation on having arrived at so happy a climax, as when a pilgrim pauses to rejoice in so much of a journey done. And naturally so, because the Corner Stone of a Mason's life has been laid.

Always, as far back as we can go in the story of mankind, the laying of a Cornerstone has been a happy event. It has always been celebrated with solemn and joyous rites. It is the basis of a new building, the beginning of a new enterprise; and the good will of God is invoked to bless the builders and the building.

How much more, then, should it be so when a man takes the first step out of Darkness toward the Light, and begins the adventure of a new life! More important by far than Temple or Cathedral is the building of a moral character and a spiritual personality. Stones will rot and Temples crumble under the attrition of time, but moral qualities and spiritual values belong to the Eternal Life.

The initiate stands in the Northeast Corner on a foundation of Justice, the one virtue by which alone a man can live with himself or with his fellows. Without it no structure will stand, in architecture, as Ruskin taught us, much less in morals. In the Rite of Destitution he has learned to love Mercy, and at the Altar of Obligation prayer has been offered, in fulfillment of the words of the prophet:

"He hath Shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God!"

In the Northeast Corner the initiate stands midway between the North, the place of darkness, and the East, the place of Light, whence healing, revealing rays fall upon the life of man. Such is his position, symbolically, and rightly so. He is an Entered Apprentice, a beginner in the Masonic Art, neither in the Dark nor in the Light. He has come out of the Darkness, his face set toward the Light, and his quest is for more Light, with yet much light to dawn upon him. What is life for? To live, of course; and only by living it do we learn what it is for, much less how live it. It is ever an adventure, a new adventure for each man, despite the millions that have lived before us, since, as Keats said about poets, "We Never Really Understand Fine Things Until We Have Gone The Same Steps As The Author." Only by living can we learn what life is, verifying the wisdom of ages alike by our virtues and our vices.

Yet it means much to have the wisdom learned by ages of living taught us in symbols and told us in a story, as it is taught us and told us in a Masonic Lodge. It brings to us the truth tried by time and tragedy, and the principles wrought out and discovered by the race in its long experience. It gives us a plan, a picture, a prophecy, and the fellowship of men going the same road.

The initiate stands Erect in the Northeast Corner, upright and ready to receive his working tools, a son of the Light, himself a living stone to be polished. What is more wonderful, what more beautiful, than Youth standing erect before God - not cringing, not groveling - seeking the Light by which to make its way through the dim country of this world to the City that hath foundations! Truly, our Masonry is the organized poetry of faith!

But why the Northeast Corner? Would not some other corner of the Lodge do as well? Perhaps it would, but Masonry is very old, going back into a time far gone, when ordinary things had meanings, real or imaginary, beyond their practical use. Such a question opens a window into things quaint, curious, and even awful; and all sorts of explanations are offered us, some of which may be named.

For example, Albert Pike spread out the map of the old world of the East - the mystical territory whence so many of our symbols and legends have come - and found that "The Apprentice represents the Aryan race in its original home on the highlands of Pamir, in the north of that Asia termed Orient, at the angle whence, upon two great lines of emigration South and West, they flowed forth in successive waves to conquer and colonize the world."

Well, what of it, interesting though it may be as a fact of long ago, if a fact it is? What truth can it teach us to our profit, beyond the suggestion that the House of Initiation took the form of the world as it was then mapped in the mind, and that the procession of initiation follows the line of march of a conquering race? It may be valuable, as preserving the dim outline of ancient history - but not otherwise.

Another student, seeking the secret of Masonry in solar symbolism and mythology, looks at the same map of the Eastern World, in the frame of an Oblong Square, studying the movements of the Sun from season to season. He finds that the point farthest North and the point farthest South on the map mark the Summer and Winter Solstices, respectively. In other words, the Northeast Corner of the World, as then mapped, is the point in the annual course of the Sun when it reaches the extreme northern limit; the longest day in the year, which in Masonry we dedicate to St. John the Baptist, the Prophet of righteousness.

Then, turning to the history of religion, he finds, not unnaturally, many rites of primitive peoples - magical rituals and Midsummer Night Dreams - celebrating the Summer Solstice. Many hints and relics of the old Light Religion are preserved for us in Masonry - rays of its faiths and fictions - one of them being that the Northeast Corner of the Universe, and so of the Lodge of which it is a symbol, is the seat of the Sun-God in the prime of his power.

So, too, the Northeast Corner, as the throne of God in hour of his majesty, became a place unique in the symbols of man, having special virtue and sanctity. As we read in the Institutes of Menu: "If he has any incurable disease, let him advance in a straight path towards the invincible northeast point, feeding on water and air till his mortal frame totally decays, and his soul becomes united with the Supreme." What more appropriate a place from which to start an edifice, or to place an Apprentice as he begins to build the Temple of his Masonic life?

Also, because of such magical ideas associated with the Northeast Corner, it was a cruel custom for ages to bury a living human being under the corner stone of a building, to mollify the Gods, and, later, as a token of the sacrifice involved in all building. Horrible as the custom was, here no doubt was a crude sense of the law of sacrifice running through all human life, never to be escaped, even by the loftiest souls, as we see on a dark cross outside the city gate.

In the crude ages all things were crude; even the holiest insights took awful shapes of human sacrifice. Life is costly, and man has paid a heavy price for the highest truth. For there is a law of heavenly death by which man advances - the death, that is, of all that is unheavenly within him - that the purer, clearer truth may rise. Evermore, by a law of dying into life, man grows - dying to his lower, lesser self and releasing the angel hidden within him. Thinking of all these strands of thought and faith and sorrow woven into the symbolism of the Lodge, how can any one watch without emotion as the Apprentice takes his place, upright and eager, in the Northeast Corner. There he stands, against a background of myth, symbol and old sacrifice, erect before God, and one thinks of the great words in the Book of Ezekiel:

"And God said unto me, Son of Man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee. And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me." Such is the challenge of God to the manhood of man, asking him to stand erect and unafraid, and commune as friend to friend. Alas, it is not easy to keep the upright posture, physically or morally, in the midst of the years with their blows and burdens. At last, a dark

Ruffian lays us low in death, and only the Hand of God, with its strong grip, can lift us from a dead level and set us on our feet forever. So, at least, Masonry teaches us to believe and live:

Lord, I believe
Man is no little thing
that, like a bird in spring,
Comes fluttering to the Light of Life,
And out of the darkness of long death.
The breath of God is in him,
And his age long strife
With evil has a meaning and an end.
Though twilight dim his vision be
Yet can he see Thy Truth,
And in the cool of evening,
Thou, his friend, Dost walk with him, and talk
Did not the Word take flesh?
Of the great destiny
That waits him and his race.
In days that are to be
By grace he can achieve great things,
And, on the wings of strong desire,
Mount upward ever, higher and higher,
Until above the clouds of earth he stands,
And stares God in the face.

"SO MOTE IT BE"

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