

A.E. Waite
Words from a Masonic Mystic

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DISCOURSE ON THE FELLOWCRAFT DEGREE

BRETHREN of the Order, and those among you in particular who have been received recently among us, there is no period too early to conceive a just and commensurate notion of the great institution to which we belong, and in which we have been incorporated as a part of its living body. It is desirable, in the first place, that we should understand certain intimations which occur in the Grade of Neophyte and in that of Fellow Craft. They are open on their surface to misconstruction, and did we afterwards pursue our researches into the history of Emblematic Freemasonry, it might even be thought that they were untrue unless we carried them further than is done commonly. Moreover, in the absence of such researches, they might come to be regarded as so many figures of speech.

The Entered Apprentice is told at an early stage of his experience that the Order possesses great and inestimable privileges as well as those secrets and mysteries concerning which he is sworn to inviolable secrecy. You will observe that the privileges are enumerated separately from the secrets, though the latter stand also for privileges. Among these I will particularize the Signs and Words of the successive Degrees. The privileges imparted by these include the right of entrance to a Lodge, as a guest or subscribing member. They are the titles of our initiation and assuredly they are more than valuable after their own kind, but they do not respond in themselves to the very wide claim which I have mentioned. I conceive therefore that there are other privileges. These are not, however, to be identified with the things implied by the great principles of the Order, precious as are the latter to our hearts, and advantageous as it must ever be to dwell within a circle of fellowship which recognizes the principles of solidarity and will at need extend them in good

will to us. They are not in the category of those things which we seek to reserve to worthy men alone. They are rather the marks, seals and characters which it is our sacred duty to display and by which Masonry is known all over the world in its practice of beneficence, benevolence and fraternity, by the love of moral truth and by the truth which abides in honor. I conclude, therefore, that the reference to inestimable privileges is itself in the nature of a mystery and covers things which do not exactly appear on the literal side of our rituals. This is the first point which I am now seeking to commemorate.

The second is concerned more especially with the obligation of the Neophyte Grade in which the Candidate is pledged to hele, conceal and never reveal the secret art and hidden mysteries of Masonry. I believe that after a little reflection I shall carry with me the concurring voice of every Brother amongst us, if I say that this pledge, with the penalties attached thereto, must cover more than the simple signs, tokens, words and procedure which takes place in our Lodges, or too elaborate machinery may be thought to be put in motion than the-end appears to require. Hence again it seems certain that the reference to secret arts and hidden mysteries is itself in the nature of a mystery and covers things which do not precisely appear on the literal surface of our Rituals. This is the next point which I am seeking to commemorate here.

For the third, we must pass from the Grade of Initiate or Neophyte to that of Fellow Craft, in which there is a brief but singularly pregnant account (1) of that which was attained by the Candidate when he was made an Entered Apprentice; and (2) of that which he is expected to perform in his new capacity as a Craftsman. In the one it is pointed out that he has made himself acquainted with the principles of moral truth and virtue. Now, this is literally true, subject to a single reserve: as one newly admitted, he was not intended to be tried beyond his strength: the principles which he is said to have acquired were

in reality communicated to him without action on his own part, but he was left in the First Degree to reflect upon them. They are actually the root matter and sum total of moral truth and all natural virtue. It is otherwise in the Degree of Fellow Craft. There it is assumed that the Masonic horizon has opened before and about him, and that he is prepared to enter an almost immeasurable region. He is accordingly advised (1) that he is expected to make the liberal arts and sciences his future study, and (2) that he is permitted to extend his researches into the hidden mysteries of Nature and science. Once again, this is an intimation which covers much more than appears on the literal surface and is a mystery which is expressed shortly but not explained in our Rituals. Here is the third point which I am now seeking to commemorate.

Let us see if there is any direction in which we can turn for a little light on these problems, and as it so happens we shall not have to go outside the Lodge itself.

On his first entrance into Freemasonry the newly received Brother will perceive that he has come into a world of emblems or symbolism, and that whatsoever takes place therein has a meaning behind it which is by no means indicated invariably on the surface. Sometimes, and indeed frequently, there is more than one inward meaning, depending on the point of view from which it is approached. The Lodge is an eloquent example of this truth. When its door opens for the Candidate he enters into an institution which has its branches spread over the four quarters of the globe. It may be a very small Lodge: it may be a Lodge of poor Brothers only: but whosoever is received therein is recognized through the Masonic world, in all countries and among all peoples. But there is more even than this: however humble in its appointments and proportions, that Lodge is a Microcosm, a symbol, a speaking likeness of universal Freemasonry. It represents also and contains the life of Masonry, and the Ceremony of his initiation integrates the new-made Brother in that pecu-

liar quality of life which is the principle and essence of the Order. He becomes part of an organic whole. In the third place, the Lodge is held to represent the three dimensions of space – that is to say, the universe itself as a cosmos: in length from East to West, in breadth between North and South, in depth from the surface to the centre, and even as high as the heavens.

It is therefore as if the Candidate on his initiation had been born anew into the universe, or that a door had opened to admit him into another cosmos. He comes with his eyes dim and with a restraint about him; he is kept for a considerable period in a state of darkness and bondage: ultimately he is instructed, and that which he finds about him is truly the symbolic representation of a new world. For him at that moment all things seem to be renewed, and it is very soon after this strange and wonderful experience that he is given a key to the meaning. He is told that he is the corner stone of a new foundation, from which he has to build up himself after another and higher manner. In other words, he has to remake his inward nature according to the perfection of the standard which is prescribed by Masonry. It is a moral standard in respect of his dealings with his Brethren and with mankind at large. It is a spiritual standard in respect of his duty towards God, and through obedience thereto it is hoped, held and known that he will ascend to the home of the spirit in the heavenly kingdom, by means of the ladder of Jacob, the successive rounds of which are called by many names, but chief among these are faith, hope and charity. It follows that he has a two-fold work to perform, but it is all in the training of himself. If he be successful, the result will be perfect in its parts and honorable to the builder. From this point of view, the just, perfect and regular Lodge is also a symbol of the man in that state which he is called to attain.

Now, the word initiate, with which we are so familiar in Masonry, signifies a person who has made a new beginning, who has entered a path of experience heretofore untraveled. Its

equivalent in other orders and fraternities is the word Neophyte. The Neophyte is also one who has made a new beginning and the term, which is Greek in its origin, signifies him who is re-born, a new plant, one who is remade. In the old instituted mysteries, like those of Samothrace, of Egypt and of Eleusis, the Candidate was regenerated or reborn — he was otherwise transferred or grafted — at the beginning of his experience, and afterwards he passed through successive stages of a new life till he attained the culminating Grade. It was the same experiment as that of Craft Masonry, in which the Candidate — as an Entered Apprentice — lays the foundation stone of that new building which is himself, raises a super structure according to the law and order that Masonry has imposed upon him, continues the erection as a Craftsman, in which Degree the mysteries of Nature and science, recommended to his study, are mysteries of God and the estimation of His wonderful works till at last he puts on the capstone when the Lodge is open in the Sublime Grade of Master.

Our secret art is therefore an art of life, an art of perfection, an art of creation according to a prescribed standard recognized in Masonry: our hidden mysteries are those of our own relations to God, man and the universe, that we may be enabled to fulfill by Masonry the higher law of our being. The inestimable privileges of Masonry include those of its symbolism, the study of which is for our instruction in this high mode of self-building. The arts and mysteries which we are pledged to conceal from the profane are also those of the peculiar law of life in Masonry by which these ends can be reached. Those who are outside the Lodge must come within it, if they desire to share in that life. It is really incommunicable beyond the mystic circle, for the simple reason that it is life itself and not one of its substitutes. While therefore we are properly pledged concerning it, there is something which we could not impart even if we tried. In some of the old mysteries, from which we are indirectly descended, initiation and its sequels meant real instruction in this

subject, and several of our most suggestive intimations are reflections from that remote source.

And seeing that the Grade of Master Mason is not so much a reflection as the very root, essence and quintessence, of those mysteries, and may be shortly described as an experiment in the deep mystery by which the soul passes through mortal life towards that life in God which is the end of all the mysteries, it comes about in this manner, my Brethren, that we are incorporated with all the great orders and sodalities of the far past and are therefore justified when we say that the meaning of our Masonic Badge is more ancient than the Golden Fleece and that our honorable institution—though under many transformations—has subsisted from time immemorial.