

Masonic Enlightenment

Edited by Michael R. Poll

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MASONRY AND WORLD PEACE

by Joseph Fort Newton

Had anyone written a story of modern civilization last spring, it would have read like a romance. What a picture it would have painted of the triumphs of art and industry, of disease yielding to the skill of science, of the intellectual linking of nations, of the rapid march of ideas, of the annihilation of time and distance by the ingenuities of invention. The bright cities of the earth, with their palaces of art and prayer, lay bathed in sunlight. Aircraft explored the sky, and wireless messages flew every whither, telling of the glory of man.

And then—a high-school boy in remote Bosnia fired a pistol, and a pall of ancient barbaric night fell over the earth, darkening the heavens. Merciful God! The tragedy of it—beyond comparison the greatest war in all the long annals of time in the new century! In an instant, all trace of civilization seemed to vanish, and nation was leaping at the throat of nation, filling the world with measureless misery and woe. Commerce languishes, art is paralyzed, religion is mocked, and civilization seems tumbling to a fall. Four days of the cost of this conflict would dig the Panama Canal and pay for it. One month of it would equip every hospital on earth to fight the great White Plague. Of the loss of life, the most precious of all wealth, who can think without a sob, remembering the cold law of biology by which, if the fittest fall, only the weak remain to father the men of times to be.

What man may ever hope to find words wherewith to tell the shame, the crime, the pity of it all. Prating of Evolution, we were swept along on the crest of an easy optimism, not realizing that we were carrying with us the lower forms of life, “moods of tiger and of ape, red with tooth and claw.” Well may we refresh our memories by reading that passage in the “Republic” of Plato, in which a Pagan philosopher laid down the rules of civilized warfare, as follows— non-combatants to be spared, no houses to be burned, no farms to be devastated, the dead to be honorably buried, no trophies of war to be placed in the temples of the gods. What a rebuke to Christian civilization in a day when shrines of art and learning and piety are ruthlessly destroyed, and men act like fiends incarnate! Indeed, a page from the story of this war reads like an excerpt from the chronicles of Hell, as witness these words from a warlord to his men: “Cause the greatest possible amount of suffering, leave the non-combatants nothing but their eyes to weep with. The law of Christian charity has no bearing on the relation of one nation to another.”

With the immediate causes of this world-shaking war we have not here to do, except to say that no matter what generalization we make about it, there will be found as many facts on one side as on the other. History will debate them for ages to come. Any investigation into the question of who fired the first gun promptly goes back into the question of who made the gun, and why? Who diverted the beautiful, constructive energy of humanity into such wanton waste and unreason? After reading the many-colored books put forth by the nations, each in its own defense, we may admit that all are right in their reasonings, if we accept their basic fallacy that a nation is a thing apart from humanity to be hedged about with walls of iron.

They are nearer the truth who look for the roots of this tragedy in the ideas taught by unphilosophic philosophers within the last decade or two. Ideas rule the race. They run like rumors, they hide in the crooked lines of a printed page, but in the end they force us into the arena to fight for them. Materialism in philosophy led, naturally and inevitably, to a worship of brute Force, bringing scientific efficiency to the service of all the horrible gods of sport and speed and splendor. Offering incense to the diabolical trinity of Mammon, Mars, and the Minotaur, we have become so vain of our material advance and scientific technique that we have forgotten that human well being lies in the pursuit of justice and brotherly love. With Nietzsche preaching atheism in the alluring style of a poet, while Treitschke and Bernhardt expounded a rationale, if not a religion, of war, 'tis no wonder that we have been brought to where we are, to a cataclysm unbelievable, except that it exists.

This is not to cry down modern inventiveness and its astonishing achievements. Far from it. Not one of us but feels the thrill of this amazing effort, albeit often futile and misdirected, to realize life. There can be no question that this is a wonderful age, romantic in its advance. Equally, there can be no question that things still more wonderful are to follow. But what is it all worth — this "will to power," this conquest of Nature — if it lead to a wide weltering chaos of world-war? To be sure, we travel more rapidly and get news more quickly, but, God of dreams, what news of savagery and slaughter! No; our ideals are wrong, and with all the suffering and ruin already wrought, maybe it will get into our brains, and at last into our hearts, that our real progress does in fact depend on the genuine love of God and our fellow man. Only in tragedy, it seems, will man learn the highest truth.

Still, if we would find the real causes of this dreadful war we must go far back and deep down into the nature of man. Human history is saturated with blood and blistered with tears. It has been estimated that in the annals of mankind, there have been only thirteen years when there was no war on earth. "Men are only boys grown tall, Hearts don't change much, after all. Nations are these lads writ large, That's what makes the battle charge."

So reads the record of the ages, and we cannot hope to reverse that order of things in a day. Envy, ignorance, jealousy, greed, hate, revenge, vanity, racial rancor, love of strife, these make war against peace. Nevertheless, we must refuse to accept war as the permanent condition of human society. Slavery was once well nigh as universal as war, if not as old, but it has been banished from the earth. We cannot look forward very far, but, despite the horror of today – perhaps, indeed, because of it – there is reason to hope for a time when war, and the menace of war, shall be removed from the terrors of human life.

– III –

What the issue of this gigantic conflict will be, no mortal can tell. One hundred years ago Europe was swept bare by wars of might against right, yet out of that long-drawn tragedy came a great advance of civilization. So it may be, must be, will be now. Make no mistake; the right will triumph, and as one nation after another is released from the burden of militarism, the arts of peace will prevail, the democratic spirit will be extended, and civilization will, in the end, be promoted. History, always the sure cure for pessimism, holds out this hope even to those, if such there be, who see above its tangled and turbulent scene no vaster, wiser Power correcting the blunders of man, and “from seeming evil still educing good in infinite progression.”

Amidst all doubts, one thing is certain: kings may pass, dynasties may vanish, but the peoples of Europe will remain substantially as they are within their historic boundaries. But these battered and impoverished peoples will be preserved for no other purpose than new wars and new disasters if they do not fit themselves with a nobler, truer way of thinking. More important than all else is the question, not as to the map of Europe, but as to what the map of the human mind is going to be after the war. How well men have learned war, reducing it to a fine art of destruction, is shown by those great guns that speak with throats of thunder, and those “airy navies grappling in the central blue,” as Tennyson predicted. Now they must learn peace, which means that they must begin with the young, and keep always at it, until mankind masters the sweeter, truer, and diviner language of fraternity.

In point of fact, we have been trying to do an impossible thing – trying to found a humane order upon a basis of brute force. It cannot be done. Long ago Greece built its structure of art and life upon a basis of slavery, and it fell. Just so, our civilization will fail and fall if it is built upon a foundation of Force. After all, it may be that this war was an inevitable result of a transition from the rule of Force to the rule of Numbers, and, ultimately, the rule of Reason and Love. One is tempted to hope that, since it had to come, it will not stop until all despotisms are swept away, and with them all

upholding of the privilege of the few against the rights of the many; until men everywhere rise up and say they will not go to war unless they have a vote on war. John, Hans and mystic Ivan will strike or soon or late, and then will come the end of Kings and Kaisers—and if this war hastens that day it worth all it cost!

As the grand divisions of geological history have their beginnings in stupendous revolutions, so, too the great new epochs in the human world. Such a time is even now with us. Manifestly, we stand at the end of an era, and the men who come after us will wonder that, seeing, we saw not, and mistook the red dawn of a new day for a house on fire. As Napoleon would say, we are condemned to something great. Whatever betide, the old order has collapsed. The times are infinitely plastic. There is no reason for letting go of faith in God or human kind. Instead, those who have eyes will see in this tempest a storm that shall clear the air of pestilential vapors and hasten the advent of a nobler world-order, through the corrected sense of the nations—the final flaring up of a blaze from falling brands, to be covered forever with penitential ashes and quenched with bitter tears.

IV

Meantime, what has Masonry to say, what can it do, in this hour of world-crisis when the race is struggling through blood and fire toward something new, shaking off shams, and coming face to face with the eternal necessities? Forming one great society over the whole globe, bringing men together without regard to race or religion, it is incredible that this Ancient Order should be inactive, much less indifferent, in a day of supremedemand.

From the first Masonry has been international, knowing no Slavic race, no Teutonic race, but only the Human race, in proof of which hear these words from its Book of Constitutions—words that stand out like stars in the night of world-feud: “In order to preserve peace and harmony no private piques or quarrels must be brought within the door of the Lodge, far less any quarrel about Religions or National or State-Policy, we being only, as Masons, of the religion in which all men agree; and we are also of all Nations, Tongues, Kindreds and Languages, and are resolved against all Politics as what never yet conduced to the welfare of the Lodge, nor ever will.

Such is the principle on which Masonry rests, and the spirit in which it has toiled through the ages, breaking down barriers of caste and creed, of race and rank, creating reverence, not only for the Divine, but also for the Human—for man as man, regardless of land or language, for the right of every man to be free of body and soul and have a place in the sun—and drawing men together in mutual respect into a profound and far-reaching fellowship. Never was its benign spirit more needed than today, living, as we are, in a world of fratricidal strife, when every energy of the race seems dedicated to destruction.

Alas, that the truth of the Brotherhood of Man should be revealed only in tragedy and terror, but if the sword of Mars stabs the world wide awake to this fact, by the very magnitude of the horror of war, it will be worth the price in suffering. Truly, the time has come when Masonry must take up its harp and strike its world-chord with all its might — strike it magnificently and with prophetic stroke.

Human unity is no fanciful dream of a poet, no far off promise of a prophet; it is a fact. Geographical boundaries do not now and never have represented either race or national potencies. Morality, intelligence, efficiency, fraternity refuse racial or political labels. There is no German chemistry, no British astronomy, no Russian mathematics. What is most excellent in Russia — its Tolstoys, its Kropotkins, its musicians, its painters, and its hard-handed millions of toilers — is not Russian, but human. The same is true of Germany, France and England. Goethe and Schiller, Koch and Kant are fellow-countrymen of Shakespeare and Darwin, of Hugo and Pasteur. The Republic of Letters and of Science is universal; it is only our patriotism that has lagged behind and become “the virtue of narrow minds” — when, indeed, it is not actually what Johnson called it, “the last resort of knaves.”

How, then, can we justify our love of our own land as over against those who hold that all patriotism is provincial, if not pernicious? Only in this way: Each nation, each race has a genius of its own, and by that fact a contribution to make and a service to render to the total of humanity. Judea was no larger than Iowa, and yet it gave to the race its loftiest and truest religion, and the strongest, whitest, sweetest soul the earth has known. Greece was a tiny land, girt about by violet seas, but it added immeasurable wealth of art, drama and philosophy to the world. So of Rome. And thus we might call the roll of races and nations, asking of each what it had or has to give of beauty and of truth to mankind. Even so, our country has a genius unique, particular, and peculiar, and by that token a service to render to the universal life of humanity. What is that service if it be not to show, not only that “government of the People, by the People, for the People shall not perish from the earth,” but that it is the highest ideal of government, and that it makes for the greatest happiness of man, alike in private nobility and public welfare? Of that genius and service our flag is the emblem and prophecy, and loyalty to that emblem implies devotion to that service. Our field is the world, but our solicitude is our own country — that it may the better make its unique and priceless contribution to the universal good. Thus, with due reverence for other nations, by loyalty to our own flag we best serve our race.

Above all nations, greater than all races, more important than all royalties is Humanity, and no one nation can live to itself, much less be truly great, without regard for the usefulness and happiness of other nations. What we need is a transvaluation of patriotism from a tribal loyalty into a universal allegiance — a world-patriotism, growing out of the deepening sense of

human solidarity, large of outlook, far-reaching and benign of spirit. As it is now, patriotism consists too much in loving our own land and hating every other—a feeling unworthy of a Republic where Teuton, Saxon, Slav, Gaul, Celt live amicably together, stand shoulder to shoulder in the industrial army, eat out of the same dinner pails, and, to a surprising degree, worship at the same altar.

V

Exactly; and that is the very genius of Freemasonry, its mission to mankind, and the spirit which it seeks to make prevail. By its very nature cosmopolitan, it thinks in terms of Humanity, rather than of race or creed or party, being as the old German Handbook defined it, the activity of closely united men who, employing symbolical forms borrowed from architecture work for the welfare of humanity, striving morally to ennoble themselves and others, and thereby to bring about “a universal league of mankind, which they aspire to exhibit, even now, on a small scale.” As Goethe said, in his poem on “The Lodge,”

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

Every Lodge is an emblem and prophecy of the world, and there will be no abiding peace on earth until what Masonry exhibits on a small scale is made worldwide, and its spirit of goodwill among men of all ranks, races and religions becomes the reigning genius of humanity. Other way out of war there is none. If, instead of meeting behind closed doors for intrigue, the men who plotted this war had met in a Masonic Lodge, not one of them would have drawn a sword ! Alas, Lilliputian militarists have kindled a fire which not even Gulliver can put out, spreading death and desolation every whither—fanning old feuds, marshalling hordes of hates, until the very existence of civilization is threatened.

What of the future ? One thing is evident: if this tragedy drags its bloody way to the bitter end, as now seems likely, every tie by which man is bound to man the world over will be needed to hold the race together; and Masonry is one of those ties. To that end, Masonry itself must recapture its old accent and emphasis upon universal principles, and take part in recruiting and mobilizing a great army of men of goodwill, if so we may dehorn the nations now goring each other to death, and bring to this passion-clouded earth the light of reason. War is waste. It is unreason. It settles nothing. It is devolution, not evolution. It is not the survival of the fittest, but the sacrifice

of the best. The canker of long peace, as Shakespeare called it, is the canker not of peace, but of materialism. No;

*The crest and crowning of all good,
Life's final star, is Brotherhood;
For it will bring again to Earth
Her long-lost Poesy and Mirth;
Will send new light on every face,
A kingly power upon the race.
And till it comes we men are slaves,
And travel downward to the dust of graves.*

What this sad world needs is a League of its "Large Eternal Fellows," tall enough of soul to look over barriers of race, walls of creed, and mountains of misunderstanding, and recognize their kinsmen in every land and language. These are the men who see that we are in more danger from the grasping greed and blind ambition of the few who rule than we ever were, ever will or ever can be from the great, toiling masses of our fellows in other lands. They see that the great generalship displayed in the war, and its good comradeship – the sagacity of its leaders, and the singing, jesting courage with which the youth of Europe is marching to the grave – are the very qualities which, if dedicated to the organization of the world upon a basis of peace, will swing the earth into a new orbit! Therefore.

*Come, clear the way, then, clear the way:
Blind creeds and kings have had their day.
Break the dead branches from the path:
Our hope is in the aftermath –
Our hope is in heroic men,
Star-led to build the world again,
To this event the ages ran:
Make way for Brotherhood – make way for Man !*

– II –

With the immediate causes of this world-shaking war we have not here to do, except to say that no matter what generalization we make about it, there will be found as many facts on one side as on the other. History will debate them for ages to come. Any investigation into the question of who fired the first gun promptly goes back into the question of who made the gun, and why? Who diverted the beautiful, constructive energy of humanity into such wanton waste and unreason? After reading the many-colored books put forth by the nations, each in its own defense, we may admit that

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– III –

What the issue of this gigantic conflict will be, no mortal can tell. One hundred years ago Europe was swept bare by wars of might against right, yet out of that long-drawn tragedy came a great advance of civilization. So it may be, must be, will be now. Make no mistake; the right will triumph, and as one nation after another is released from the burden of militarism, the arts of peace will prevail, the democratic spirit will be extended, and civilization will, in the end, be promoted. History, always the sure cure for pessimism, holds out this hope even to those, if such there be, who see above its tangled and turbulent scene no vaster, wiser Power correcting the blunders of man, and “from seeming evil still educing good in infinite progression.”

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In point of fact, we have been trying to do an impossible thing – trying to found a humane order upon a basis of brute force. It cannot be done. Long ago Greece built its structure of art and life upon a basis of slavery, and it fell. Just so, our civilization will fail and fall if it is built upon a foundation of Force. After all, it may be that this war was an inevitable result of a transition from the rule of Force to the rule of Numbers, and, ultimately, the rule of Reason and Love. One is tempted to hope that, since it had to come, it will not stop until all despotisms are swept away, and with them all upholding of the privilege of the few against the rights of the many; until men everywhere rise up and say they will not go to war unless they have a vote on war. John, Hans and mystic Ivan will strike or soon or late, and then will come the end of Kings and Kaisers – and if this war hastens that day it worth all it cost!

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And his persistence
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Of men in this world.*

Every Lodge is an emblem and prophecy of the world, and there will be no abiding peace on earth until what Masonry exhibits on a small scale is made worldwide, and its spirit of goodwill among men of all ranks, races and religions becomes the reigning genius of humanity. Other way out of war there is none. If, instead of meeting behind closed doors for intrigue, the men who plotted this war had met in a Masonic Lodge, not one of them would have drawn a sword ! Alas, Lilliputian militarists have kindled a fire which not even Gulliver can put out, spreading death and desolation every whither — fanning old feuds, marshalling hordes of hates, until the very existence of civilization is threatened.

What of the future ? One thing is evident: if this tragedy drags its bloody way to the bitter end, as now seems likely, every tie by which man is bound to man the world over will be needed to hold the race together; and Masonry is one of those ties. To that end, Masonry itself must recapture its old accent and emphasis upon universal principles, and take part in recruiting and mobilizing a great army of men of goodwill, if so we may dehorn the nations now goring each other to death, and bring to this passion-clouded earth the light of reason. War is waste. It is unreason. It settles nothing. It is devolution, not evolution. It is not the survival of the fittest, but the sacrifice of the best. The canker of long peace, as Shakespeare called it, is the canker not of peace, but of materialism. No;

*The crest and crowning of all good,
Life's final star, is Brotherhood;
For it will bring again to Earth
Her long-lost Poesy and Mirth;*

*Will send new light on every face,
A kingly power upon the race.*

*And till it comes we men are slaves,
And travel downward to the dust of graves.*

What this sad world needs is a League of its "Large Eternal Fellows," tall enough of soul to look over barriers of race, walls of creed, and mountains of misunderstanding, and recognize their kinsmen in every land and language. These are the men who see that we are in more danger from the grasping greed and blind ambition of the few who rule than we ever were, ever will or ever can be from the great, toiling masses of our fellows in other lands. They see that the great generalship displayed in the war, and its good comradeship—the sagacity of its leaders, and the singing, jesting courage with which the youth of Europe is marching to the grave—are the very qualities which, if dedicated to the organization of the world upon a basis of peace, will swing the earth into a new orbit! Therefore.

*Come, clear the way, then, clear the way:
Blind creeds and kings have had their day.
Break the dead branches from the path:
Our hope is in the aftermath –
Our hope is in heroic men,
Star-led to build the world again,
To this event the ages ran:
Make way for Brotherhood – make way for Man !*