

CRADLE AND THE LODGE

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Once again the march of the days has brought us near to the day of all the year that is the best - Christmas Day, with its gentleness, its joy and its good will. We have National Holidays of deep historic meaning and beauty; but Christmas is a day in the calendar of humanity - a day dedicated to childhood and the home.

Only one other day can compete with Christmas in our regard, and that is Easter, with its "Song Of Those Who Answer Not, However We May Call;" and being days of Faith, they are both days of hope and forward-looking thoughts. If Easter teaches us hope in the life to come, Christmas asks us to hope for the life that now is. How fitting it is that we have a festival of the dawn of life linked in our faith with the Easter hope at sunset.

The hope of the world is the child. Here the everlasting enterprise of education finds its reason and sanction. The child holds in his chubby hand the future of the race, our hope of social beauty and human welfare. He is the custodian of whatever of truth and worth we may bequeath to the times to come; the window in which, at sunset, we see the morning light of a new day. In him we live again, if in now other way - save in the memory of God, who does not forget. He is our earthly immortality.

No man does more to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to earth than he who takes care that child is born in purity and honor. A child nobly and sweetly born will not need to be born again, unless some killing sin slay him by the way. No wonder the greatest religion in the world makes a cradle its shrine, and finds in the heart of a little child its revelation of God and its hope for man.

What unaccountable blessings came to the world with the birth of one little child, born of poor parents in an obscure nook in a small country long ago, and who, without sword or pen, divided the history of man into before and after. What strange power of influence lay sleeping in that Manger-Cradle, to be set free in a short life, which has changed the moral and spiritual climate of the earth. There shone a light that can never fail, revealing the Spirit of God and the meaning of life, making mother and child forever sacred, and softening the hard heart of the world. It is a scene to sanctify the world, so heavenly yet so homey, and it has done more than any other one influence to purify the life of man.

No man of us - whatever his religion - but is touched to tenderness by that picture of a Child, a Mother hovering near, a Father in the background, and a Star standing sentinel in the sky. Before that day the order was Father, Mother, Child - now it is Child, Mother, Father. Such power one Child had to alter the old order of the world. They are indeed wise men who follow such a starry truth and bow at such a shrine, linking a far-off wandering star with the Cradle of a little Child.

For Christmas is both a fact and a symbol. It is the greatest fact of history and the symbol of the deepest truth man can know on earth. It tells of a time when the idea of God was born anew in the mind of man. Think how you will about the Babe in the Manger, debate as you like about the facts of his life, it is a fact that since Jesus lived God has been nearer to the life of man, more real and more lovable. The Christmas scene shows us that God is not off up in the sky, but near by, even in our hearts if we are wise enough to make room for him.

If we open the Book of the Holy Law we learn in the Old Testament that man lives in God, who is the home of the soul from generation to generation. It is a profound truth. It makes the world homelike.

It unites us as a family under the shelter of a Divine Love. In the New Testament we learn that God lives in man, and that is the greatest discovery man has ever made. For unless there is something of God in man - in every man - we can not find God, much less know him. The revelation of God in humanity is the basis of all democracy worthy of the name, and the only hope of brotherhood among men. No wonder Christmas is a day of music and joy. It brings heaven and earth together, and teaches us that no hope of the human heart is too high, no faith too holy to be fulfilled by the love that moves the sun and the stars. God in man - here is the secret of all our hope for the better day to be when men will no longer make war, but will live in fraternity and good will. Unless the Divine dwells in man there is no strand strong enough to hold against the dark forces which fight against peace. God in man - here is the mystic tie by which man is bound to man in bonds of mutual need and service and hope.

So we begin to see what the cradle has to do with the Lodge. Indeed, as all the wise teachers of the Craft agree, the Lodge is a Cradle and initiation is birth, by which man makes his advent into a new world. The Cable-Tow, by which we may be detained or removed should we be unworthy or unwilling to advance, is like the cord which joins a child to its mother at birth. Nor it is removed until, by a voluntary act, we assume the obligations of a man, a new unseen tie is woven in our hearts. Henceforth we are united by an invisible bond to the service of the race.

In the First Degree we are symbolically born out of darkness into the light of moral truth and duty, out of a merely physical into a spiritual world. Symbolically we enter into a new environment, as the child does at birth, with a new body of motive and law, taking vows to live by the highest standard of values. In other words, an Entered Apprentice discovers his own Divinity - learns who he is, why he is here, and what he is here to do. No secret that science can uncover is half so thrilling. Finding a new star out on the edge of the sky is nothing alongside the discovery of God in the soul.

In the same way, in the Third Degree, we are symbolically initiated into an eternal life in time. Actually we pass through death and beyond it while yet walking upon the earth! God is here within us, eternity is now, and death is only the shadow of life - such is the secret of Masonry. Once a man really discovers it, and governs himself accordingly, he is a free man - erect, unafraid, happy. Thus Masonry, in its own way,

teaches the truth of Christmas and Easter Day; and deeper truth, it is not given us to know or imagine. It lights up the world with joy, and changes even dull death into a last enchantment.

God in man, the soul of man a Cradle of the Eternal Love - what higher truth has man ever dreamed! By the same token, the hope of the world, and of each of us, lies in the birth and growth of the Divine in man - in your life and mine - refining lust into love, and greed into goodness. Also, since we have the same spark of Divinity within us, and the same starry ideals above us - even as we are made of the same dust, and know the same dogs of passion at our heels - it behooves us to love one another, to seek to know, to understand and to help our fellow man. For here, in truth, is the basis and prophecy of brotherhood.

God be thanked for a Truth so Divine that it lends dignity to our fleeting days - for a day of poetry in the midst of gray days of prose. On that day we work and plan that the child may have his toy, and the friend his token of our love; and, forgetting ourselves, we learn that our life on other days is but a muddled memory of what it ought to be. On one day, at least, we seek out the poor, the sick, the weary and the world-broken; and find in service a joy we know not in selfishness.

Blessed Christmas Day - symbol of the eternal Child and the "Cradle Endlessly Rocking." It takes us down from our towering pride and teaches us humility and sweet charity. It brings us simplicity of faith in which we find peace. It rebukes our bitter wisdom because it is unholy and unhelpful. It brings across the years, a memory of days when life was stainless, and gives us hope that some time, somewhere, we shall find again the secret we have lost.

O Great heart of God, Once vague and lost to me,
Why do you throb with my throb tonight, Is this land Eternity?
O little heart of God, Sweet intruding stranger,
You are laughing in my human breast, A Christ Child in a manger.
Heart, dear heart of God, Beside you now I kneel,
Strong heart of faith, O heart of mine, Where God has set His seal.

Wild, thundering heart of God, Out of my doubt I come, And my foolish feet with the
prophet's feet, March with the prophet's drum.