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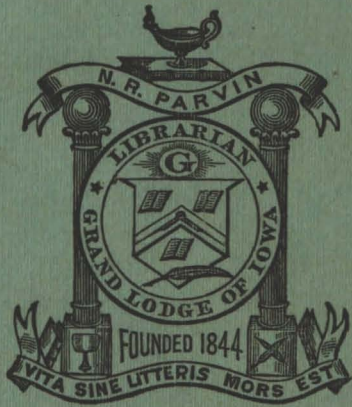
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The Ministry of Masonry

By JOSEPH FORT NEWTON



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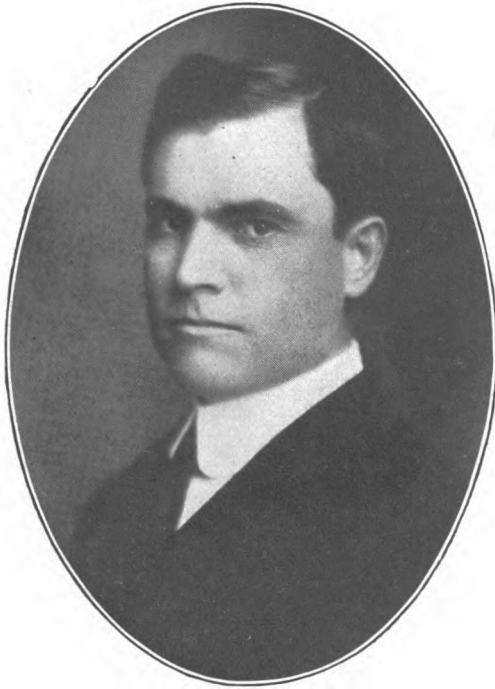
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REV. JOSEPH FORT NEWTON

The Ministry of Masonry

BY

Rev. Brother Joseph Fort Newton, D. Litt.

Grand Chaplain, Grand Lodge of Iowa, A. F. and A. M., and

Chaplain of Mt. Hermon Lodge, No. 263, of Cedar Rapids



An address delivered before the
Grand Lodge of Iowa, A. F. and A. M., at the
Seventieth Annual Communication
held at Council Bluffs
June tenth, nineteen hundred and thirteen

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA
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THE MINISTRY OF MASONRY

*Past Grand Master Block, Members of the Grand Lodge of
Iowa, Ladies, and Gentlemen:*



SOMETHING in this scene, something in the words of my dear friend, appeals to me very deeply. So gracious a greeting evokes feelings beyond my words, and I understand what Lord Tennyson must have felt when, looking out upon the sea and listening to its voices, he cried:

"I would that some tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me."

Once upon a time, as my friend has said, I tried to talk to you as best I could on The Mission of Masonry, its faith, its philosophy, its demand for freedom, and its plea for universal friendship.

But the more I brood over the mystery of this order, its history, its genius, its possibilities of ministry to the higher human life, the more the wonder grows, the higher the horizon, and the longer the vistas that unfold. Let me beseech you, then, to lend me your hearts while I tell you a little more of the meaning of Masonry as it has grown up in my heart. [Studying Masonry is like looking at a sunrise; each man who looks is filled with the beauty and glory of it, but the splendor is not diminished.] Over all alike its ineffable wonder falls, subduing the mind, softening the heart, and exalting the life.

I.

The better to make vivid what lies in my heart, let me recall a scene from one of the great books of the world, *War and Peace*, by Count Tolstoi—a name that should be spoken with reverence wherever men assemble in the name good-will. He was, if we except Lincoln, the tallest soul, the most pic-

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turesque and appealing figure who walked under our human sky in the last century. This book, the greatest of its kind known to literature, makes one think of a giant playing with mountains, tossing them to and fro as though they were toys; so powerful is it, so vast in its sweep, so vivid in its panorama. Its heroine is a whole nation—the beautiful, strange, tormented land of Russia. We see its lights and shadows, its wide expanse, and its quiet hamlets; its people at work and play, in peace and war—now hovering like a shadow on the heels of their enemies, now fleeing in terror in the glare of their burning cities. What a picture of the tumult of a nation, and the vicissitudes of life, in the light the Napoleonic invasion!

One of the arresting figures of the story is Count Pierre Bezuhov—in whom Tolstoi has shown us one side of his own soul, as in Prince Andre he has unveiled the other. Pierre is the richest man in Russia, owning vast estates, including both the land and the serfs on the land. Like so many young noblemen of his day, he has lived a wild, sensual, dissolute life, careless alike of the rights and wrongs of his fellows. He was married to a beautiful, bewitching, sensual woman, whose paramour he has just killed in a duel. On his way to St. Petersburg he falls in with an old man, simply dressed, but with the light of a great peace in his face. The stranger addresses the Count and tells him that he has heard of his misfortune, referring to the duel resulting in the death at his hands of the lover of his wife. He is aware, too, as he goes on to say, of the wild, sin-bespattered life the Count has lived, of his way of thinking, of his pride, indolence, and ignorance. The Count listened to these severe words, he hardly knew why—perhaps because he heard in them an undertone of sympathy, the accent of a great pity, and what he heard in the voice he saw in the kindly face.

On the hand of the old man the Count noticed a ring, and in it the emblem of the order here assembled. He asked the stranger if he was not a Mason. Whereupon the old man, looking searchingly into the eyes of the Count, said that he belonged to that order, in whose name he extended to him the hand of a brother man, in the name of God the Father. At the mention of the name of God a smile curled on the lips of the Count, who said :

“I ought to tell you that I don’t believe in God.” The old Freemason smiled as a rich man, holding millions in his hand, might smile at a poor wretch.

“Yes, you do not know Him, sir,” said the stranger. “You do not know Him, that is why you are unhappy. But He is here, He is within me, He is in thee, and even in these scoffing words you have just uttered. If He is not, we should not be speaking of Him, sir. Whom dost thou deny? How came there within thee the conception that there is such an incomprehensible Being?”

Something in the venerable stranger, who spoke earnestly, as one who stood in the light of a vision, touched the Count deeply, and stirred in him a longing to see what the old man saw, and to know what he knew. Abject, hopeless, haunted by an ill-spent life, with the blood of a fellow-man on his hand—his eyes betrayed his longing to know God. Though he did not speak, the kindly eyes of the stranger read his face and answered his unasked question :

“He exists, but to know Him is hard. It is not attained by reason, but by life. The highest truth is like the purest dew. Can I hold in an impure vessel that pure dew and judge of its purity? Only by inner purification can we know Him.”

Finally, the old man asked the young nobleman if he would not like to look into the mysteries of Masonry. Not so much what the stranger had said as what he was—his gentle, au-

stere, benign spirit, that had in it something of the Fatherhood of God—made the Count say, “Yes.” The stranger asked him to report at a certain room in St. Petersburg, where he would be introduced to those high in authority among Freemasons. Meanwhile, what the gently stern old man had said sank into the soul of the hitherto heedless young nobleman; and when he reported at the lodge room and was asked, as every man is asked, the one indispensable question: “Do you believe in God?”—something deeper than his doubts, something higher than his scepticism spoke within him, and he answered, “Yes.”

There follows a detailed description of his initiation, which those who are not Masons may be curious to read. Unfortunately, it tells them nothing of what takes place in a lodge room on such occasions; but it will show them the spirit that lives and glows on the altar of Masonry. No one but a Mason could have written it; and while the chain of evidence is not quite complete, I am safe in saying that, as with Count Pierre in the story, so with Count Tolstoi himself, it was Masonry which first lifted him out of the pit of atheism and sensualism, set his feet upon the Rock of Ages, and started him toward the city of God. Does this not suggest to us the deeper meaning of Masonry, its higher ministry, and the service it may render to the inner life of man?

II.

What is Masonry? What is it trying to teach? What does it seek to do? Above all, what can it do for the man who receives it into his heart, loves it, and lives in the light of it? What profound ministry may it render to the young man who enters its temple in the morning of life, when the dew is on his days and the birds are singing in his heart? Let me try to answer these questions this summer afternoon in the spirit

of Count Tolstoi, who must hereafter be numbered with those prophets and bards—with poets like Goethe and Burns, musicians like Mozart, patriots like Mazzini and Washington—who loved this historic order. Such names shine like stars in the crown of humanity, and none with truer lustre than that of Tolstoi who was a teacher of purity, pity, and peace among men.

Time out of mind Masonry has been defined as a system of morality, veiled in allegory, and illustrated by symbols. That is so far true—far enough, indeed, to describe a world-encircling fellowship and its far-ramifying influence. But it is not of the extent of Masonry that I wish to speak this afternoon, but, rather, of its depth—its service to the lonely inner life of man where the issues of character and destiny are determined, for good or ill. No more worthy purpose can inspire any order than the earnest, active endeavor to bring men—first the individual man, and then, so far as possible, those united with him—to a deeper, richer fellowship with spiritual reality. Since this is the purpose of Masonry, let us inquire as to what it is, whence it came, and how it seeks to reach the souls of men where the real battles of life are fought, now with shouts of victory, now with sobs of defeat.

It is true that Masonry is not a religion, still less a cult, but it has religiously preserved some things of highest importance to religion—among them the right of each individual soul to its own religious faith. Holding aloof from separate sects and creeds, it has taught all of them to respect and tolerate each other; asserting a principal broader than any of them—the sanctity of the soul and the duty of every man to revere, or at least to regard with charity, what is sacred to his fellows. Our order is like the crypts underneath the old cathedrals—a place where men of every creed, who long for something deeper and truer, older and newer than they have hitherto

known, meet and unite. Having put away childish things, they find themselves made one by a profound and child-like faith, each bringing down into that quiet crypt his own pearl of great price—

“The Hindu his innate disbelief in this world, and his unhesitating belief in another world; the Buddhist his perception of an eternal law, his submission to it, his gentleness, his pity; the Mohammedan, if nothing else, his sobriety; the Jew his clinging, through good and evil days, to the one God, who loveth righteousness and whose name is ‘I AM;’ the Christian, that which is better than all, if those who doubt it would only try it—our love of God, call Him what you will, manifested in our love of man, our love of the living, our love of the dead, our living and undying love. Who knows but that the crypt of the past may yet become the church of the future?”

There have been great secret orders, like that represented here today, since recorded history began; and no man may ever hope to estimate their service to our race. In every age, in every civilized land—from the priests of Isis on yonder side of the Pyramids, to the orders of Eleusis and Mithras in Greece and Rome—we trace their silent, far-reaching influence and power. The *Mysteries*, said Plato, were established by men of great genius who, in the early ages, strove to teach purity, to ameliorate the cruelty of the race, to refine its manners and morals, and to restrain society by stronger bonds than those which human laws impose. Cicero bears a like witness to the high aim of the same mystic orders in his day. Thus in ages of darkness, of complexity, of conflicting peoples, tongues, and faiths, these great orders toiled in behalf of friendship, bringing men together under the banner of faith, and training them for a nobler moral life.

No mystery any longer attaches to what those orders taught, but only as to what particular rites, dramas, and symbols were used by them in their ceremonies. They taught faith in a God above, in the moral law within, heroic purity of soul, austere discipline of character, justice, piety, and the hope of a life beyond death. Tender and tolerant of all faiths, they formed an all-embracing moral and spiritual fellowship which rose above barriers of nation, race, and creed, satisfying the craving of men for unity, while evoking in them a sense of that eternal mysticism out of which all religions were born. Their ceremonies, so far as we know them, were stately and moving dramas of the moral life and the fate of the soul. Mystery and secrecy added impressiveness, and fable and enigma disguised in imposing spectacle the simple, familiar, everlasting laws of justice, piety, and a hope of immortality. As Cicero said, the initiates of the *Mysteries* not only received lessons which made life tolerable, but drew from their rites happy hopes for the hour of death.

Masonry stands in this tradition; and if we may not say that it is historically related to those great ancient orders, it is their spiritual descendant, and renders the same ministry to our age which the *Mysteries* rendered to the olden world. It is, indeed, no other than those same historic orders in disguise; the same stream of sweetness and light flowing in our day—like the fabled river Alpheus which, gathering the waters of a hundred rills along the hillsides of Arcadia, sank, lost to light, in a chasm in the earth, only to reappear in the fountain of Arethusa. Apart from its rites, there is no mystery in Masonry, save the mystery of all great and simple things. So far from being hidden and occult, its glory lies in its openness, its emphasis upon the realities which are to our human world what air and sunlight are to nature. Its secret is of so great and simple a kind that it is easily overlooked; its mystery too obvious to be found out.

Our age resembles in many ways the age which saw the introduction into the world of the teachings of Jesus. To one who regards mankind with tenderness, a time like this is full of hope, but full of many perils also. Men are confused, troubled, and strangely alone. Anything is possible. Forms of faith are changing, and many are bewildered—as witness the number of those running to and fro, following every wandering light, and falling, often, into the bogs of fanaticism. Oh, the pathos of it! A strange indifference has settled over the world, but underneath it there is a profound, unsatisfied hunger. There is a mood today which soon will utter a cry, and it will be a cry for more vivid sense of God: that is our hope. Yet that cry may fling many a soul upon the bosom of doubt and despair: that is our fear. Amidst this peril, Masonry brings men together at the altar of prayer, keeps alive faith in the truths that make us men, seeking, by every resource of art, to make tangible the power of love, the worth of beauty, and the reality of the ideal. Who can measure such a ministry, who can describe it!

III.

Let me strive to make it all more vivid by recalling a parable translated by Max Muller from the lore of the East. The gods, having stolen from man his divinity, met in council to discuss where they should hide it. One suggested that it be carried to the other side of the earth and buried; but it was pointed out that man is a great wanderer, and that he might find the lost treasure on the other side of the earth. Another proposed that it be dropped into the depths of the sea; but the same fear was expressed—that man, in his insatiable curiosity, might dive deep enough to find it even there. Finally, after a space of silence, the oldest and wisest of the gods said:

.....

"Hide it in man himself, as that is the last place he will ever think to look for it." And it was so agreed, all seeing at once its subtle and wise strategy.

Man wandered over the earth for ages, searching in all places, high and low, far and near, before he thought to look within himself for the divinity he sought. At last, slowly, dimly, he began to realize that what he thought was far off, hidden in "the pathos of distance," is nearer than the breath he breathes, even in his own heart. Here lies the deepest ministry of Masonry—that it makes a young man aware of the divinity that is within him, wherefrom his whole life takes beauty and meaning, and inspires him to follow and obey it. No hour in life is more solemn and revealing than that in which a man learns that what he seeks he has already found, else he would not be seeking it. Once a man learns that deep secret, life is new, and the old world is a valley all dewy to the dawn, aglow with beauty and athrill with melody.

There never was a truer saying than that of Thomas Carlyle when he said that the religion of a man is the chief fact concerning him. By religion he meant, as he went on to explain, not the creed to which a man will subscribe or otherwise give his assent; not that necessarily; often not that at all—since we see men of all degrees of worth and worthlessness signing all kinds of creeds. No, the religion of a man is that which he practically believes, lays to heart, acts upon, and knows concerning this mysterious universe and his duty and destiny in it. That is in all cases the primary thing in him, and creatively determines all the rest; that is his religion. It is, then, of vital importance what faith, what vision, what conception of life a man lays to heart, and acts upon. It is as a man thinks in his heart whether life be worth while or not, and whether the world be luminous or dark.

Let me show you that this is so. Optimists and pessimists live in the same world, walk under the same sky, and observe the same facts. Sceptics and believers look up at the same great stars—the stars that shone in Eden and will flash again in Paradise. Thomas Hardy and George Meredith were contemporaries and friends—one looking out over a dismal, shadow-haunted Egdon heath, under a sky as grey as a tired face; the other a citizen of a world all dipped in hues of sunrise and sunset, with a lark-song over it! Clearly, the difference in all these cases is a difference not of fact, but of faith; of insight, outlook, and point of view—a difference of inner attitude and habit of thought with regard to the worth of life and the meaning of the world. By the same token, any influence which reaches and alters that inner habit and bias of mind, and changes it from doubt to faith, from fear to courage, from despair to sunburst hope has wrought the most vital and benign ministry which a mortal may enjoy in the midst of the years.

Every man, as each of you can testify, has a train of thought on which he rides when he is alone. The dignity and nobility of his life, as well as its happiness, depend upon the direction in which that train is going, the baggage it carries, and the scenery through which it travels. If, then, Masonry can put that inner train of thought on the right track, freight it with precious baggage, and start it on the way to the city of God, what other or higher service can it render to a man? That is just what it does for any man who will give himself to it, bringing to him from afar the old wisdom-religion—that simple, pure, and lofty truth wrought out through ages of experience, tested by time, and found to be valid for the life of man. Whoso lays that lucid and profound wisdom to heart, and acts upon it, will have little to regret, and nothing to fear, when the evening shadows fall.

High, fine, ineffably rich, and beautiful is the faith and vision which Masonry gives to those who foregather at its altar. By such teaching, if they have the heart to heed it, men become wise, knowing that all evil ways have been often tried and found wanting. By it they learn how to be both brave and gentle, faithful and firm; how to renounce superstition and yet retain faith; how to keep a fine poise of reason between the falsehood of extremes; how to accept the joys of life with glee, and endure its ills with patient valor; how to look upon the folly of man and not forget his nobility—in short, how to live cleanly, kindly, calmly, opened-eyed, and unafraid in a sane world, sweet of heart and full of hope. It may not be a substitute for religion, but he who makes it a law of his life, loves it, and obeys it, will be most ready to receive the great passwords of religious faith. Happy the young man who in the morning of his years takes this simple and high wisdom as his guide, philosopher, and friend!

IV.

Such is the ministry of Masonry to the individual—lifting him out of the mire and setting his feet in the long, white path marked out by the foot-steps of ages; and through the individual it serves society and the state. If by some art one could trace those sweet, invisible influences which move to and fro like shuttles in a loom, weaving the net-work of laws, reverences, sanctities which makes the warp and woof of society—giving to statutes their dignity and power, to the gospel its opportunity, to the home its canopy of peace and beauty, to the young an enshrinement of inspiration, and the old a mantle of protection; if one had the pen of an angel then might one tell the story of what Masonry has done for Iowa. No wonder George Eliot said that eloquence is but a ripple on the bosom of the unspoken and the unspeakable!

What is it that so tragically delays the march of man toward that better social order whereof our prophets dream? Our age and land are full of schemes of every kind for the reform and betterment of mankind. Why do they not succeed? Some fail, perhaps, because they are imprudent and ill-considered, in that they expect too much of human nature and do not take into account the stubborn facts of life. But why does not the wisest and noblest plan do half what its devisors hope and pray and labor to bring about? Because there are not enough men fine enough of soul, large enough of sympathy, noble enough of nature to make the dream come true. So that when Masonry, instead of identifying itself with particular schemes of reform, devotes all its benign energy to refining and ennobling the souls of men, she is doing fundamental work in behalf of all high enterprises. By as much as she succeeds, every noble cause succeeds; if she fails, everything fails!

Recall what was passing before the eyes of men in this land fifty years ago today. What gloom, what uncertainty, what anxiety—Gettysburg less than a month away! The very life of the republic hung in the balance! Think of those first three days of July, 1863, when fifty-four thousand young men, the flower of our future, lay dead and wounded—piled in heaps of blue and grey, quivering with pain, their white faces turned to the sky! Nor was that all. Far away in northern towns and southern hamlets, sad-faced women heard, now with shrieks, now with dumb, unutterable woe, the long roll-call of the dead! What man who has a heart, or who cares for the future of his race, does not pray that such scenes may never again be witnessed on this earth! What can prevent a repetition of the horrors of war? Nothing but the growth in the hearts of men of the spirit of justice, freedom, and friendship which Masonry seeks, quietly, to evoke and

inspire! If our fathers had known each other in the sixties as we know each other today, there would have been no civil war! So it will be the world over, when man comes to know his fellow-men as he learns to know them and love them at the altar of this order. Then shall be fulfilled the song of those who sang of "peace on earth *among men of good-will!*"

Again, no one need be told that we are on the eve, if not in the midst, of a stupendous and bewildering revolution of social and industrial life. It shakes England today. It makes France tremble tomorrow. It will alarm Germany next week. The questions in dispute can never be settled in an air of hostility. If they are settled at all, and settled right, it must be in an atmosphere of mutual recognition and respect such as that which Masonry strives to create and make prevail. Whether it be a conflict of nations, or a clash of class with class, appeal must be made to intelligence and the moral sense, as befits the dignity of man. Amidst bitterness and strife Masonry brings men of capital and labor, men of every rank and walk of life together as men, and nothing else, at an altar where they can talk and not fight, discuss and not dispute, and each may learn the point of view of his fellows. Other hope there is none save in this spirit of friendship and fairness, of democracy and the fellowship of man with man.

Even so it is in religion—that kingdom of faith and hope and prayer so long defamed by bigotry, and distracted by sectarian feud. How many fine minds have been estranged from the altar of faith because they were required to believe what it was impossible for them to believe—and, rather than sacrifice their integrity, they turned away from the last place from which a man should ever turn away. No part of the ministry of Masonry is more beautiful and wise than its appeal, not for tolerance, but for fraternity; not for uniformity, but for unity of spirit amidst varieties of outlook and opinion. God be thanked for one altar where no one is asked to surrender his

liberty of thought and become an indistinguishable atom in a mass of sectarian agglomeration. What a witness to the worth of an order that it brings together men of all faiths in behalf of those truths which are greater than all sects, deeper than all dogmas—the glory and the hope of man!

When is a man a Mason? When he can look out over the rivers, the hills, and the far horizon with a profound sense of his own littleness in the vast scheme of things, and yet have faith, hope, and courage. When he knows that down in his heart every man is as noble, as vile, as divine, as diabolic, and as lonely as himself, and seeks to know, to forgive, and to love his fellow man. When he knows how to sympathize with men in their sorrows, yea, even in their sins—knowing that each man fights a hard fight against many odds. When he has learned how to make friends and to keep them, and above all how to keep friends with himself. When he loves flowers, can hunt the birds without a gun, and feels the thrill of an old forgotten joy when he hears the laugh of a little child. When he can be happy and high-minded amid the meaner drudgeries of life. When star-crowned trees, and the glint of sunlight on flowing waters, subdue him like the thought of one much loved and long dead. When no voice of distress reaches his ears in vain, and no hand seeks his aid without response. When he finds good in every faith that helps any man to lay hold of higher things, and to see majestic meanings in life, whatever the name of that faith may be. When he can look into a way-side puddle and see something besides mud, and into the face of the most forlorn mortal and see something beyond sin. When he knows how to pray, how to love, how to hope. When he has kept faith with himself, with his fellow man, with his God; in his hand a sword for evil, in his heart a bit of a song—glad to live, but not afraid to die! In such a man, whether he be rich or poor, scholarly or unlearned, famous or obscure, Masonry has wrought her sweet ministry!

