

Keystone of Royal Arch Masonry

It was a matter of great surprise to me when I was this afternoon informed by the committee of the Grand Chapter that I was to take part in the exercises of the evening. This surprise was increased when I remembered that on the floor of this Grand Chapter, as its officers and representatives, were men gifted, brilliant, and accomplished, known throughout the state, and whose names were as familiar as household words to Iowa Masons. But as the first Masonic lesson taught is obedience to the constituted authorities, it shall be my task this evening to speak to you briefly of the "Keystone of Royal Arch Masonry."

The keystone is that which gives strength and durability to the arch; so that which imparts to Royal Arch Masonry its vitality and perpetuity may be properly termed its keystone. It is in the traditions upon which an institution is founded and the principles it is intended to inculcate that will be found the elements of its strength and perpetuity.

Each one of the Grand Masonic Bodies has been founded upon some remarkable epoch in the history of the race, and the chosen emblems of each one have come to represent, not only to Masons, but to the world at large, vital and enduring principles.

Ancient Craft Masonry is founded upon that memorable period when Solomon, the wise king of Israel, erected his temple to the living God, and the traditions, symbolism, and ritual of the craft may be traced to that period, so remarkable in the history of the race.

The square and compass, the distinguishing badge of Ancient Craft Masonry, is today typical of virtue, morality, and rectitude.

Tomorrow there will be gathered in your beautiful city some of the most distinguished men of this grand state, who are proud to wear upon their breasts the cross of the Templars.

This magnificent branch of Masonry is founded upon that period of the world's history when the proudest and best representatives of the days of chivalry, at the call of Peter the Hermit, rallied round the standard of the cross to rescue the sepulchre of our Saviour from the hand of the Moslem.

The cross, which eighteen hundred years ago was to the civilization of that day what the gallows is to this - the emblem of crime, dishonour, and ignominy - is today the sign of the highest virtue and Christian civilization, the final token of the love of God for man, and the shrine at which the highest civilization of the day is proud to bow. As in the clays of old, when the waves of Galilee were madly tossed by the tempest, they recognized in the words of the lowly Nazarene the voice of their God, and were quiet, so do the mad passions of the human heart become softened and controlled by the grand principles of which the cross is the symbol; and it is recognized throughout the world as the token of redeeming love. So the keystone of Royal Arch Masonry has in its symbolism lessons important for civilization to learn.

Capitular Masonry, like its sisters, bases its traditions on a memorable period of human history. The history of the Jewish people is the most remarkable, interesting, and romantic of any race upon the face of the earth.

From the time when for them the ten commandments were traced upon the tablets of stone by the finger of the Most High, down to the present, amid all their wonderful prosperity, their unparalleled suffering and unmerited persecution, their wonderful history has been a fruitful theme for the historian and an inspiration to the poet. It is upon one of the most memorable, and certainly the most pathetic, parts of that history that the traditions of Royal Arch Masonry are based.

You will remember that after the temple had been completed the city of Jerusalem was destroyed, and the temple sacked and levelled by an invading foe. The magnificent temple - pride of the Jewish people, endeared to their hearts by the visible manifestation of the presence of their God - was reduced to a pile of ruins; the holy vessels, the pride of their people, came into the possession of her foes, and the captive daughter of Judah was chained to the chariot wheels of her conquerors.

Nothing in the literature of the race, from the Iliad of Homer to the best productions of the nineteenth century, can equal in pathos and beauty the lamentations of the Hebrew poets over the destruction of the temple, the desolation of Judah, and the captivity of her people. They hung their harps on the willow, and could not sing the songs of their people in a strange land and as the captive of a foreign foe; but through all the sorrowing years of the Babylonian captivity, through all the desolation and sorrow that came upon them, the Jewish people never lost their love and reverence for their God, nor hope in the final deliverance of their race.

We can imagine the joy that filled their hearts when the captive prophet of the Jews interpreted for the King the meaning of the handwriting on the wall that foretold the downfall of their captors, and the deliverance of their race. What joy could equal that which inspired the hearts of this wonderful people when Cyrus issued his proclamation that they should be freed from their captivity to assist in re- building the city and temple of their God.

It is on the capture and destruction of Jerusalem, the years of their Babylonian captivity and the re-building of the temple, that the traditions and principles of Royal Arch Masonry are founded. Its first great lesson is reverence for God, a lesson that reiterated from the first to the last step in Masonry. While the Mason institution is not intended to take the place of religion, it is intended to place its votaries upon the great cornerstone of all religion - a reverence for, and a sense of responsibility to the Most High.

From that wonderful history we also learn that, amid the desolation and sorrow that is so often the lot of humanity, it is our duty to place the most implicit reliance in the final triumph of truth and justice, and support ourselves under every affliction, with a realization that our lives and our fate are in the hands of Him "Who doeth all things well."

We are also taught that every disaster and danger that besets our pathway will yield to patient and persistent effort, and though it may be our fate to work and search amid the ruins of our fondest hope, that patient work will bring from them fruits as a reward of our labour and a solace to our hearts.

Its tendency is to strengthen the bonds of friendship and brotherhood; and as no danger was so great, no difficulty so appalling, that it was not shared alike by the Jewish people in building the temple, so we are taught today that by the union of heart and hand in the great work of up-building society and advancing civilization of the we can best accomplish the work given us to perform.

May that God who was the trust and hope of the Jewish people through all their years of affliction, and who preserved His religion untarnished amid the captivity of His people and the desolation of their homes, inspire our hearts with the great principles and purposes of Royal Arch Masonry, that we may prove true to our profession and ourselves. If we do this, Masonry will be to civilization and society what the keystone is to the arch.

C. M. Harl

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