

Three Things I Know

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Synopsis of an address delivered before annual meeting.

THREE times in my life I have had a very wonderful dream; each time it has come back with an amazing vividness, born, on each occasion, of an hour of inner struggle and crisis. Always it is a vision of a great cathedral, built in the ancient form of a cross, stately, imposing, piteous; an old gray home of the human soul, the shrine of faith, fellowship and hope. It is Gothic in its architecture, that form of architecture created and glorified by the genius and history of Freemasonry, its achievement and its monument; the most eloquent of all forms, as embodying our own spirit and attempting to make God eloquent among men. I can see in my dream, or my vision, the lift of its pillars, and the leap of its arches and its great, glorious dome, and in that framework always this vision has come. I have never been able to see the altar or the chancel distinctly, because of a very blinding light. No face, but only the sweep of a garment, vast, white, but I know who is there at the altar and the chancel. I do not hear a voice, but I somehow know what is being said. Once again, in that framework of Gothic glory, He is speaking the words that He spoke of old, on the mountain and by the sea. Somehow, I don't know how, I know who it is and what He is saying. Next to the temple and the speaker is the audience gathered there, the most extraordinary of which any man ever dreamed. All the great minds and prophets of the older world are there. Moses, the mighty law giver, the great legislator of the human race, is there. Confucius, with his slant eyes and his queue, who dreamed of the superior man, the ideal, to which all good men labor! Buddha, all pitiful, whose religion is the most majestic symphony of melancholy in the whole compass of human history. They are there. Plato, a man of angel mind, the idealist, father of philosophy and of theology, with the greatest, sweetest and most luminous spirit that has crossed our human pathway; by his side Aristotle, father of science; patient, exact investigator, who anticipated, in flashes of insight, so many things that have been verified both in science and philosophy.

THE company of the prophets, from the days of Isaiah, with his golden voice, on down. They are all there; I know them and see them, on into our own time, and very vivid to me. Very distinct is a face of Emerson. I see it only in profile, a finely chiseled face, in which the very genius of New England took form. What a company it is! I could not name all of them, but Voltaire, who built a little temple over which he inscribed, "To the Glory of God," is there. And while the speaker utters once more, with that voiceless voice, the truths which are the 'Magna Carta' of the spiritual life of mankind,

I see all those in that temple nodding assent and saying, each in his own heart, Amen, amen, amen.

Such is my dream, my brethren. It came, by the mercy of God, when I was only a lad in Texas, and again, in an hour of crisis in Iowa, blessed to me and never- to-be-forgotten, for the friendships of a lifetime formed there, and for the confidence of the Grand Lodge of Iowa; and once in London, in the wild, dark, confused and terrifying days of the World War. Always with increasing vividness that dream has blessed my life. It is a vision of unity, as you will discover. It leads to the ends of the earth and the limits of human history, looking backward and looking forward. It includes all religions and all races in its embrace. Out of that vision have grown certain great convictions which, like the rock ribs that hold the earth together, hold my life.

FIRST, that all just men, men, all spiritually minded everywhere of one religion. They are trying to say the same thing, own tongue, with his own accent and emphasis, the speech that each colored by his own environment, the degree of his own spiritual development. All are fundamental participators in one spiritual life, which they seek to interpret.

That conviction is so fundamental in my life that it makes me utterly indifferent to small things that seem to divide men into different religions or different sects. Some of my brethren in the lodge and in the church, not knowing what I am telling you, misunderstand many things. They call me an "Ecclesiastical polygamist," for example, meaning one who belongs to many churches. Yes, exactly because, in the light of this vision, to me there is only one church, universal and eternal. All good men belong to it. The different religious communions to me are like the different rooms in one house, and the doors are all open. I walk from room to room in my Father's house. I hold fellowship with all alike. Perhaps I may live long enough to belong officially to every church, on principle, even long enough to have my vision understood.

My second great conviction is that all just men, all devout men, are not only trying to say the same thing, but they are trying to do the same thing, to define faith, to refine and purify the mind of humanity and build it up into righteousness and moral intelligence and honest good will. They have the same ideals. If Confucius speaks of the superior man, he means what we mean by the Christian man, Christ. It is the one ideal that God has planted in the dream and hope of mankind; one great moral and spiritual enterprise going on in the world. It is a great consolation, it is a great reinforcement to realize that fact. It falls over one like a consecration, and gives strength.

AND the third conviction is, since they are trying to say the same thing, and trying to do the same thing, the greatest things they must finally learn to do together. You can see, then, the philosophy of my interest in THE MASONIC SERVICE ASSOCIATION and the Federal Council of Churches. I have the honor to be a member of the committee on direction of the Federal Council of Churches of America, and also to be Educational Director of THE MASONIC SERVICE ASSOCIATION. It is extremely interesting to see the same thing going on among the religious communions and the Grand Lodges. They are trying to learn how to do the same things together, things which can only be done together. The same objection, the same criticism, the same fears and misgivings are expressed in the Federal Council as in this ASSOCIATION. Some of the great religious communions will not belong at all to the Federal Council of Churches. A distinguished, brilliant member of a great church said in an address a few weeks ago, "The Federal Council will either collapse or become a super-church." It sounded very familiar to me! Somewhere I have heard a rumor of that kind said about this ASSOCIATION - that it would either collapse or become a super-Grand Lodge! Well, there is no more idea of that thing in our minds than there is in the Federal Council of Churches to make a superchurch. One is as mean and undesirable as the other. It is interesting that some of our churches are in it with one foot. My church, for example, with one foot; tentatively, experimentally. The Episcopal communion will cooperate on International affairs and the Committee of International Good Will, but no further than that. So there are some lodges in America who will cooperate with us, and use all our literature, and all our material and all our machinery, but they won't use us, or won't let us use them in a common undertaking. It is amusing. To watch this practise and procedure going on adds to the joy of life. But it is going on! it is just as inevitable as anything can be. The very necessities of the situation demand a united religious communion, in fellowship, at least, and in work, for the things that need to be done can be done in no other way. War cannot be abolished by stupid sectarianism.

PESTILENCE, famine, war. These three are the greatest evils, and the worst of these is war. Science has killed one pestilence after another. They lie like dead snakes by the side of the road. Commerce and intercommunication make it possible to send relief from one part of the world to the other very quickly. Only a renewed spiritual life can kill the spirit of strife in the hearts of men and so purify them as to make war impossible. It will take the whole of religion, united, purified, and renewed, to do that.

But, this afternoon I am thinking of that Gothic Cathedral which Freemasonry built, as the framework, the shrine, the home of the religious life. For we are builders. This is what we are here to build, a temple, a house not made with human hands. It will tower into the heavens, but it is a temple. It is the great landmark of Freemasonry, that temple. What are the foundations of it?

There are three things that I know about Freemasonry, not much else. I studied upon it many years, starting my study in the great library of the Grand Lodge of Iowa. But there are three fundamental things that I do positively know.

The first is that man was made for righteousness. He can never be a man, he can never be happy until he is a righteous man. The mystery of moral life comes back again and again as the profoundest mystery of all life. I find it here written in my own heart; what the dear Quakers call "a stop in the mind," something that arrests me and compels me to pass a moral judgment upon my acts and my thoughts. Where it came from I do not know.

I have my beliefs. It is upon what I know that I build my beliefs. But I do know I have this mystery of the moral sense in my own being. It is here. I did not create it. It commands me. The profoundest mystery to me is not that I do wrong, as all of us do wrong, but that there is something that brings me to judgment for doing wrong, something within myself, that awful whisper of moral law. I understand what the Great thinker meant when he said that there were two things that overwhelmed him, the still depth of a starlit night, and the awful moral law within.

When I try to think, when I try to interpret the meaning of that great fact in the life of my fellow man, then I have the cornerstone of all theology, of all understanding of life. You can push it back just as far as you please. You can say, as some will want to say, that this whisper within me is the echo of an old racial memory and experience. No doubt. But whence came the first bias of man towards righteousness, the first sense and command within himself that he must be a righteous man? Whence did that voice of that command come?

WHAT is true of myself is true of humanity. It can never be happy until it attains righteousness. Man was made for righteousness. He has a choice and an ability to choose the right and refuse the wrong, or to choose the wrong and refuse the right. One involves the other.

I am aware that there prevails the fatalistic philosophy in our time which tells us that we are no more responsible for our thoughts and acts than we are for the shape of our heads and the color of our eyes. That philosophy is plausible, but in my heart I know it is false. I am not a machine. I am an organism.

That is the first fundamental thing that I know about Freemasonry. And the second thing is, Mr. Chairman, that not only is man made for righteousness, but man is made for man. He cannot attain the richest character, the moral personality, apart from his fellow man. Talent may develop in solitude. Character is the creation of fellowship, of fraternity. This ancient and honorable fraternity, like the rest, is built upon this fact, that we are made one for the other; that our lives fit one into another and are woven together to make a divine fabric, a cloth of gold. This fact unites us in a temple of vision. We are made one for another. Mohammed was right when he said if man would not help man the end of the world had come. The end of the human world has certainly arrived when man refuses to aid and assist his fellow man. Here is the basis of our beautiful doctrine of brotherly love, relief and truth, because we can never know the truth until we know it together. There are some things we may know in isolation, but we cannot know the highest truth alone. We can only learn it together. It is by practicing brotherhood that we learn to know God. Finally, the third thing.

NOT only is man made for righteousness and man made for man, but man is made for God. His spirit is formless and alone, even in the warmest fellowship, until at last together we find the source from whence we come, the light from whence flashes that spark of moral law and spiritual vision within us, the veiled kindness of the Father of all men. One of the greatest minds of any time put it in an unforgettable way when he said, "Lord, Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee." I am speaking about God, in a Fraternity the first great universal landmark of which is God.

Three things that appeal to me in Masonry are, first, its simplicity. All supremely great things, like all supremely great men, are simple. Turn the pages of history and call the names of Martin Van Buren, of Benjamin Disraeli, of Talleyrand! you feel that you are in the presence of great men, but something arrests you and prevents you from believing those men are supremely great. They had great characteristics. They were past masters of art and wise in manipulations of diplomacy. But turn mother page and read the names of Washington and Lincoln, and instantly you feel that those two belonged to a different order of men. They are great, in the open and in the sunlight, and sublimely simple. So it is with Masonry. There are many fraternities in the world. They have great characteristics. But to me the

outstanding glory of Masonry is the simplicity of its symbolism, of its faith, of its philosophy.

AS I have tried to state it, man is made for righteousness, man is made for man, and man is made for God. You cannot go beyond that or above it. It is something to think about through a whole lifetime, as a scheme of philosophy and of faith.

Second, in all my Masonic life, as a student or a teacher of Masonry and a worker in its behalf, it has been always in my heart to use Masonry as a wand of blessing and never as a weapon of battle. It is intended to make men friends, to bring men of all types of temperament, antecedents and training together, discover their brotherhood and make them builders of a purer world. The temptation is very great sometimes, for good men and true, to use Masonry as a weapon of battle. But we must never do it. I refuse to do it. It is too great. It is too beautiful. It is too holy.

THIRD, to me Masonry is one of the forms of the divine life among men. It has come to us from a long, long past, bringing symbolisms to understand which is to understand the meaning of life; what it is to be a man and how to be a righteous man; how best to serve our fellow-man and, therefore, best serve God. It is not a religion, but it is religion in its very essence and genius, and spirit.

Its simplicity then, its dignity, and its spirituality, these things, with the vision I have told you, sustain me in all that I try to do, and permit me to forget the incredible pettiness of mind that we sometimes encounter, sustaining and enabling me to join hands with my brethren everywhere to do something, if it be only a little, before the end of the day, to make a gentler, kinder, and wiser world in which to live.

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