

### **Sign, Token and Word**

Now, whence came this "sign, token, and word"? We read a good deal about a certain meeting or convention being held in the city of York, in 926, and we are told that the rules and regulations of the masons were framed at that meeting, and that the "sign, token, and word" were established there, and carried from that meeting throughout the land. There is no proof of it, but at the same time there must have been a meeting somewhere, where these rules and regulations were adopted, and it is quite possible it was held in the City of York, but we do not know. We still seek more light, and every few years a little ray of light comes to us out of the darkness. Now, of the rules and regulations framed during the period to which I have been referring, many copies are in existence--about seventy-- and they are very interesting documents. Of the seventy, not two are exactly alike; yet there is such a similarity between them, that we are quite justified in believing that they originated from one far-off long lost original. They commence with an invocation to the Trinity, which we believe is the original of our opening prayer in the First Degree. There follows the traditional history, introducing men such as Lamech, Noah, Hermes, Euclid, Tubal Cain, David, King Solomon, coming down to Naymus Graecus, Charles Martel, and ending with Ethelstan. Inasmuch as the traditional history ends with Ethelstan, we are justified in believing that it was about that time that these rules were arranged and coded.

With regard to these rules, I want to say a word or two. Although we are of the opinion that the bishops not only taught the use of the working tools, but also their symbolic meanings, still one would naturally expect that the rules and regulations of an operatives' society would, at any rate, give prominence to operative rules. Strange to say, they do not. A great many of the rules--the majority of them--regulate conduct between employed and employers, the conduct of the employer towards the workman, and the conduct of the workmen towards one another. You would naturally expect that; but right in front of these rules and regulations are three which are not operative, but dealing with faith and conduct. Let me read from a manuscript of the fourteenth century, one of the very earliest we have:--

(1) That whoso will con this craft and come to estate (position) He must love well God and holy church algate.

(2) And to his liege Lord the King To be true to Him over alle thing.

(3) And thy fellows thou love also For that the craft will that thou do.

Is it not significant that right in the front of these rules-- operative rules and regulations which bound them together as an operative society of working men, there should be these three rules for faith and conduct? It seems to me to be exceedingly significant. These same rules I could trace for you in documents of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, until we come to our books of Constitutions, and there we get the same thing only in modern phraseology, right through the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. So long as these rules and regulations have existed, never mind how they changed in course of years, there always stood, right in front of them, these three--love of God, fidelity to the King, and assistance and loyalty to one another.

The golden age of operative Freemasonry was the twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, for during that period the whole of our grand and glorious English cathedrals were erected. Then came the decline--due probably to three causes, first, the long-continued war--civil war--Masonry is an art of peace--war destroys and Masonry erects, and Masonry never did flourish in times of war. Freemasonry today, alas, is under a cloud, and there are brethren whom we cannot meet. I think it is sad that it should be so. God grant that the cloud may soon pass away, and that Masons the world over may be brothers once again.

The first cause of this decline, as I have said, was the long-continued wars, which impoverished the country. The second cause was the dissolution of the monasteries. The monasteries had been great supporters of the operative masons. The third cause was the advent of Puritanism. The people had always desired that their temples for worship should be the most beautiful and magnificent that man could devise, and skill could accomplish. But when Puritanism came in, they were content with temples of worship which were small in size, with little or no ornamentation, and easy to erect. In their dilemma the masons turned from what had been the wealthiest portion of the community --the Church--to the next wealthiest portion--the landowners, the nobility, and the gentry of the land, and for one or two centuries they appear to have occupied themselves in the erection of "the stately homes of England," many of which

still remain through the length and breadth of the land. This brought our ancient brethren into association with a different class of people altogether from that with which they had associated hitherto. Their previous associates had been ecclesiastics, and they had imbibed very much from that association, but now they became associated with men of a different class altogether--men of education, men of leisure, men of wealth. You can understand this would have an effect upon the society, and it had this effect, that many of these landowners were attracted by Freemasonry. They were struck with its antiquity, and they were struck with the many curious claims which were made on its behalf by those who belonged to it. And they were struck, in a measure, by the mystery which surrounded it. There is nothing like mystery to attract people, and so these landowners said, "Can we be masons?" They were attracted all over the country, the men whose mansions were built by the masons, and they began to inquire what it meant. And so they sought admission, and the masons said, "You know we cannot admit you as masons, because you are not masons; but, although you are not, we will accept you as though you were," and that was the origin of the word "accepted" mason. These men were not masons, but they accepted them as brothers, as though they were masons; and so at that time-- about the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries--the society was composed of free and accepted masons. In the early part of the eighteenth century the society had again got down to a very low ebb, and the members of four lodges in London decided to make an effort to revive it, and to bring it back to its old position of importance and splendor. These four lodges, therefore, met to see what could be done. There was the lodge at the Goose and Gridiron ale-house, St. Paul's Churchyard, the lodge at the Crown ale-house, the lodge at the Apple Tree Tavern, in Covent Garden, and the lodge at the Rummer and Grapes, Westminster. They met in June, 1717, and established a Grand Lodge, the original of our Grand Lodge of today. They had three principal officers, their Grand Master and Two Grand Wardens. One was speculative and two were operative, showing that the operative element was still the dominating one. Three years later we find that the proportion changes--there were two speculative and only one operative. Six years later we find that the operatives had disappeared. Their three principal officers --the Grand Master and the two Wardens-- were all speculative, and from that time our society has been gradually losing its

operative character, and for the last century or so we have been practically an exclusively speculative and philosophical society.

There is much more I could say, but I have given you, I think, a good deal to study, much food for thought, and many subjects which I recommend to your attention. But bear this in mind, that amid all the changes that took place in the rules and regulations which bound them together, in the conditions under which they worked, and in the work on which they were employed, the brethren never lost sight of their allegiance to those three rules to which I specially draw your attention. They were the foundation upon which they built the structure, the edifice of Freemasonry. And I am firmly convinced that as long as we Freemasons of today are firm and faithful in our allegiance to our Masonic principles, which are similar, we need never fear but that our society will go on progressing and flourishing. We may rest assured that throughout the ages to come it will weather all storms, it will withstand all shocks of revolution, surviving perhaps the wreck of many empires, and even, let us hope, resist the destroying hand of time.