

FREEMASONRY AND IMMORTALITY

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CONCERNING the Immortality of the Soul, Freemasonry offers no argument. It states the principle as an unquestioned integral part of the Institution. The hope that life does not end with the physical body, but continues through a boundless future, has through past ages been an inspiration to brightness of life, patience, perseverance and process. As a life force it has throbbled through the inertia of savage existence and quickened man to those extraordinary efforts that produced civilization. A shining pillar of cloud by day, of fire by night, the beacon of humanity is Immortality.

Long before the written Word of Revelation, men had seen its prototype in the forces of nature. Eternal life was written on the midnight skies in the constancy of the constellations, on the gracious face of earth in recurring forms of beauty in the springtime, and on the azure deeps of heaven in the daily miracle of the morning sun. And with the dream of eternity quite naturally came to be associated the idea of a physical resurrection.

The Resurrection of the Body is a doctrine dear to human hearts. Through the influence of heredity, it has become an instinctive expectation. Its prototypes still appeal to us, religious sects teach it, literature has engraven it on its pages, love and hope have enshrined it, and human beings probably have a more distinct vision of its meaning than of any strictly spiritual idea.

In ancient times, hierarchies magnified its importance till it became the most impressive element of religious belief. It was taught of old that every soul was to pass through purgatorial processes in the under world; and that the soul found worthy would eventually return to earth, perfected, to re-inhabit the old physical body, and thereafter live under more favorable conditions than in the former life. In order that the returning spirit might have as little trouble as possible in finding and occupying the body, the dead were embalmed and placed in vaults as carefully prepared as homes. This curious idea of the outcome of immortality has its present day counterpart in hierarchical opposition to cremation, and in priestly exercising and blessing of burial places of the faithful. Freemasonry does not discuss re-incarnation of the immortal spirit, except mentioning it as one of Mackey's Landmarks. What Freemasonry asserts is that the spirit is immortal.

It was also taught of old that, if, after repeated opportunities, a soul was not amenable to purgatorial improvement, it was at last annihilated by a flaming ray on the steps of the underworld. Modern priestcraft has built up a doctrinal system of punishments in the spirit world that, to be effective, would logically require a physical body. Burning brimstone and immortal spirits are not co-ordinates. Freemasonry does not speculate on the question. It teaches that men should be good and true, not through fear, but because their claim of Divine relationship makes uprightness of life a natural attitude.

While men may generally allow that the progress made in our lifetime bears some relation to our progress in eternity, priestcraft has urged that it bears an exceptional and disproportionate relation. In ancient Egypt, this idea was so successfully exploited by the priesthood that almost every act in the daily life of the people had its rigid rules established and was constantly scrutinized by the temple authorities. And national life and thought became so crystallized into unchanging, and eventually meaningless, habits and customs, that in the end it checked progress and helped to ruin the nation. In modern times, we see its imitation in the lingering imposition of the Confessional, Friday fasting, and similar petty superstitions. Freemasonry teaches that the hope of immortality should free man from superstition, and encourage him of his own free will and accord so to shape his life that it shall be fitted to be a living stone in the Temple of Life.

Ancient religious systems classed kings with the immortal gods, whose mouthpieces and privileged representatives the priesthood claimed to be. They divided the people into classes, and established a caste system with the priesthood at the head. Today, we see the reflection of this in the Divine Right of kings and the still more audacious pretensions of pontiffs. Freemasonry classes kings, priests and princes with all other men; it strips away the artificial attributes of power, wealth and caste, and declares all men equal because they are all children of the Supreme Father. This has an interesting parallel in the claim of equal civil rights in our Declaration of Independence. Both Freemasonry and our Republic are a constant protest against autocracy.

Priestcraft has declared some of the great and good of the past to be saints, beings with direct and special relations to humanity, and with special influence in

Heaven. Freemasonry recognizes the debt we owe to men of the past, men who lived in less favorable times than ours, but still sought the light of knowledge, strove valiantly for progress, and endeavored in their lives to justify their claim of Divine relationship. The aspiring spirit in men today recognizes a similar fervency in men of the past, and holds all such in esteem, not after the superstitious manner of priestcraft, but only in so far as the memory of their example may influence us also to be faithful, just and true.

On the doctrine of the Immortality of the Soul, Freemasonry represents: not a threat, but a promise; not fears, but hopes; not autocracy, but liberty.