

of which it differs, so far as we can learn, from all the systems of symbolic philosophy or worship which have existed in the world. And this is the first great light, which appears not only imbedded in the very centre of the system to-day, so that it could not possibly be removed without unhinging and destroying the whole fabric of the three degrees, but from the place it holds and the manner in which it is treated throughout, and the utter impossibility of providing any substitute in case of its removal, must, of necessity, have been present and incorporated as the centre-piece and key-stone of the work at the beginning.

I know that in some places, under the teaching of certain deistic philosophers, the Holy Writings have been set aside, and the Book of Constitutions substituted as the first great light, and placed upon the altar with the square and compasses; and the lodges so furnished have been opened and closed, and have performed the external ceremonies of the several degrees, but no one can say that the so placing of the Book of Constitutions can make it in any sense a great light, or anything like a substitute for the Holy Writings, unless the whole body of the degrees be so changed as to make it immaterial what is first or last, or else the other two great lights be shorn of their sublime significance, in order to reduce them below that which is made the first. For all lights must, of necessity, be subordinate to that which is first, both in kind and degree.

Since the three degrees of Masonry are so formed and co-ordinated that no portion of one exists except in correlation with that which is contained in both the others, it is manifest that the whole, with all its parts, even to particulars, was contemplated in the beginning.

Since the whole order of the three degrees forbids that there should be less than three great lights, and since the square and compasses are well known to be two of the three, and neither of them the first! and as no other implement or geometric figure can be found which can be placed before them, it follows that the whole body of mere symbolism is exhausted without including the first great light, and if a first is to be found at all, it must be something more exalted than any symbol whatever; and if so, it must be something which conveys intelligence (light) directly, as writings or inscriptions.

But all human writings are inferior to symbols, both in dignity and force; therefore if any writings could be found, they must be such as are held to be of divine origin—speaking as from the mouth of the Grand Architect of the Universe himself, and such, and such only, could be placed first in a system which, from beginning to end, sets forth the divine order flowing in harmony through the three indispensable and corresponding degrees of the universe, moral, intellectual and physical.

From these considerations, it is clear to my mind that the Holy Writings, that is, those received as such, whether the same we now recognize, or some portion thereof, or some now lost, were, from the very first creation of a masonic lodge, placed on the altar as the first of the three great lights which were to illumine, not the corporeal eye, but the soul and mind of the seeker after wisdom.

It is only by contemplating the lodges so "furnished" that we perceive it in its perfection and also in its completeness. Otherwise, its incompleteness would be apparent to all, and the beauty and richness and order of the work be changed to imperfection, poverty and confusion.

Therefore, let who will deny the character which Masonry ascribes to the Holy Writings, it must still be admitted that it was because they, or some portion of them, were deemed to be of divine origin that they were accepted as the first great light, and this by men who, either by inspiration or otherwise, so far transcended in wisdom all of the learned with whose works we are acquainted, that they were capable of discovering and organizing Ancient Craft Masonry.

These considerations should induce us to pause and reflect before we give up our judgment, with that of all the illustrious line of Masonic Masters who have gone before us, to the clamorous and self-sufficient demands of men who deem their special sciences—that is, what they understand of them—the alpha and omega of the universe, and themselves the oracular expounders of all hidden things.

Let us reflect that if Masonry and its first great light were taken away to-day, there is among them no man, or body of men, who could reconstruct the one in its wisdom and simplicity, or produce anything to be compared with the other, though they were granted the days of a generation to prepare for the work.

There are three words which occur in masonic discourse more frequently than others. They represent three ideas which are of special significance in Masonry. Take away these, and Masonry would be as completely devastated as the temple of Solomon after the Babylonian conquest. The words are *labor*, *light*, and *harmony*. They correspond to the three great supports, wisdom, strength, and beauty; for strength is that by which labor is effected, wisdom is light, and harmony is beauty, and because t