

FREEMASONRY IN THE PRESENT CRISIS

An Address Recently Delivered
Before the Victoria Lodge, No.
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The world is in the crucible and is breaking. Armageddon has come and the last great fight is in progress. Every nation must declare itself on one side or the other and must show its sympathies by word or by deed; every institution is on trial and must give an account of itself, of its principles, its precepts, its tendencies.

And Masonry cannot escape the test. I to-night apply the touchstone, use the test tube, the furnace, the balance—in a feeble and human way and with feeble and human powers, thoroughly recognizing my utter fallibility, I shall write upon her wall "Mene, mene, tekel"; and then, with you, consider whether "Upharsin" is to follow.

I have no great concern with the history of Masonry; much of it mythical as all unwritten history must be, much of it trivial as is the early history of every land and every ancient institution. No doubt, as man retains in his body and, indeed it may be, in his mind, the remains of organs, instincts, which belong to the earlier history of the species, as we still retain in our law, the remains, relics, of the customs of our ancestors, Celt, Saxon, Norman, or their masters, the Roman, whether military or clerical, so in Masonry are the remains, relics, of an earlier state, a state more wedded to mystery, fonder of ceremonial, charmed with ritual, addicted to the bizarre and the surprising. Were it not for our native conservatism, our dislike to "remove the ancient landmarks," there are matters in our

beloved Order which we might desire to see changed; there are oaths which could with advantage lose some of their gruesomeness, some of the "frightfulness" of the penalty invoked for breach of them; there are charges which are in some parts not only of doubtful or of no utility but even positively misleading in the light of modern discovery and thought; there is much which is based upon what we should now consider a wrong view of the aim and end of Masonry, its real significance as a worldwide organization and its true place in society. Much there is which we owe to the parent body adopting the views of William Preston, one of the most ardent of Masons, thoughtful of scholars and whole-souled lovers of his land and his brethren, but in many things not much in advance of his day—and that day was a century ago.

What I examine is Masonry of the present, the active, living organism with vigorous life and vigorous shoots, though amongst them may perchance be found an occasional dying branch or one already become decayed, a branch which the tree shot forth in its earlier days, which did its work for its period but which in the course of time has become withered and useless, it cumber the parent stock and might well be pruned away and cast into the fire. A tree is judged by its present not by its past, by the branches which live, not by the occasional one which is dead. The destruction of the dead would but add to the vigor and usefulness of the living, would but remove an obstacle to the fullest life and fullest development of a noble tree.

How, then, does our Order stand in the present in reference to the greatest of all struggles?

The murder of the Archduke at Sarajevo, of which at one time so much was made, is now almost forgotten; every one now knows, every