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| The highest claim of Freemasonry to consideration is that it is philosophical |
| truth, concealed from the masses and taught to the adepts by symbols. |
| But every intelligent Mason knows that of every hundred of the Brethren, |
| taken as one falls in with them, not more than two or three regard the symbol- |
| ism of Freemasonry as of any real value, or care to study it. To do so, it seems |
| to all the others, would be idle and unprofitable labor. |
| Nor is this contempt for Masonic symbolism confined to the Masons |
| who are laboring men, or even to those who are illiterate; on the contrary, in |
| speaking of the symbolism of Masonry at very many places, to some thousands |
| of Masons in all, I have not found these Masons to be less attentive and less |
| anxious to learn, or setting less value upon the symbols, than those holding |
| high positions, or the intelligent or the educated. |
| It is patent to everyone that among those who care least for the symbolism |
| of the Order are the Masters and other officers of our Lodges, and the Grand |
| Masters and other dignitaries of our Grand Lodges; and that the encomiums |
| lavished upon the symbols and their meanings by editors and authors, are for |
| the most part artificial and insincere. |
| It is easy to see why men of intelligence and education have little or |
| no respect, even when they delude themselves by believing that they do |
| have a great respect, for the symbols and the explanation of the symbols |
| of Freemasonry. |
| When a rope is put round the neck of one of these, of what can he sup- |
| pose it to be a symbol, but slavery, degradation, the choking of life out of a |
| malefactor? If he submits to it, hoping to learn its symbolic meaning by and |
| by, what estimate must he set upon the symbolism of Masonry, when he is told |
| afterwards that the purpose of putting it around his neck was that if he should |
| refuse to proceed in the Degree, he might, by means of it, be taken out of the |
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| Lodge and into the street without making a disturbance, that is, if he resisted, |
| he could be choked down by it and dragged out. |
| I do not suppose that it has ever occurred to one Mason in a thousand to |
| ask whether "cable-tow" is an English word at all: or that one in a thousand has |
| ever been moved to inquire what he had sworn to, in swearing that he would |
| do certain things "if within the length of his cable-tow:' And if one in a thou- |
| sand ever ask the meaning of this phrase, I venture to say that, as he had not |
| known what the phrase meant to which he had solemnly sworn to Almighty |
| God, under an awful penalty, to conform his conduct, so neither did any one |
| of those who exacted it from him know its meaning. |
| When a man of intelligence, a scholar, is gravely told, by the Book |
| of the Lodge of one of the great Masonic writers that the forty-seventh |
| problem of Euclid, in his joy for the discovery whereof, Pythagoras cried |
| out "eureka" and sacrificed an hundred oxen, "teaches us that Masons are |
| great lovers of the arts and the sciences in general," the "explanation" of |
| this symbol of nothing, is not calculated to produce in his mind any great |
| admiration of Masonic symbolism.' |
| And as it was not Pythagoras who cried "eureka," but Archimedes, cen- |
| turies afterward, upon making quite a different discovery,' his respect for the |
| learning of those to whom we owe our current Masonic lectures is likely to be |
| slightly diminished by this proof of their ignorance. |
| When one is informed that "the principal tenets of Masonry are included |
| between the two points of the compasses," it is very rarely the case, I am sure, |
| that it occurs to him to inquire, of himself or others, what this phrase means. |
| And if anyone has ever inquired of himself or others, it is very doubtful, I |
| think, whether his inquiry met with any satisfactory response. |
| We have all seen the two points of the compasses under the square; then |
| one point above and one below it, and then both above. Who among us ever |
| received any other explanation of this than that one meant that he had yet to |
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| make progress in Masonry, and the other two that had made further progress? |
| That he had done so he knew, without the necessity of being so informed by |
| having taken a second and third Degree. |
| And who has ever been informed why the relative positions of the points |
| of the compasses and of the square are symbolical of progress in Masonry? |
| Who among us was ever told that there was any symbolism in the three |
| implements used by the assassins, and the parts of the body on which the |
| blows were inflicted? I do not ask who has ever had any explanation as to the |
| meaning of these "weapons and blows" for it was never given in a Blue Lodge. |
| And yet, if a man is in the habit of thinking at all, must it not seem sin- |
| gular that in a recital supposed to be of facts, two men out of three who had |
| conspired together to extort a secret which honor forbade him to divulge, from |
| a resolute man, or, upon his refusal, to slay him "armed" themselves, one with |
| a twenty four inch rule and one with a common square of wood, or metal, as |
| "weapons"? Ought not the patent absurdity of the supposed fact to induce a |
| suspicion that there is something more in this than a recital of facts and actual |
| occurrences?—that there are symbolical meanings concealed in these imple- |
| ments and blows which somebody ought to know? |
| When the candidate is first "brought to light" and relieved of his "cable- |
| tow" "because he is bound by a stronger obligation;' he is told that he beholds |
| the three Great Lights of the Lodge, by the light of the three lesser lights. The |
| three Great Lights are "the Holy Bible;' the "square" and the "compasses," and |
| they are thus explained to him. |
| "The Bible is dedicated to God, because it is His inestimable gift to man; |
| the square to the Master; because it is the proper emblem of his office; and the |
| compasses to the Craft, because by a due attention to its use, they are taught |
| to keep their passions within due bounds." That is all. |
| If, not accepting this explanation without analyzing it, phrase by phrase |
| and word by word, to see whether it really gives sufficient reasons for consider- |
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| ing the square and compasses two of the Great Lights of the Lodge, one were |
| to criticize it, what would be the result?' |
| Why is the square the proper emblem of the Master? If it be so, how does |
| that constitute a Light of the Lodge, and invest it with that character? Is every |
| emblem of an office a light of the Lodge? Is a square any more so than the level |
| and the plumb, the emblems of the offices of the Junior and Senior Wardens? |
| "The Bible;' it is said, "is dedicated to God:' To "dedicate" is "to consecrate, |
| hallow, devote, inscribe to a patron:' The Bible is "the word of God:' How is |
| His own word "dedicated" to Him? It is dedicated to Him, it is said, "because it |
| is His gift to man:' Is a gift dedicated to the giver? How is the square "dedicated" |
| to the Master? Is it meant that it is dedicated to his use? But the Bible is not |
| dedicated to the use of God. He has given it to man for man's use. |
| How are the Craft taught, by a due attention to the use of the compasses, |
| to keep their passions within due bounds? Cannot a man draw a larger or |
| smaller circle at pleasure with the compasses? The principals of the moral law, |
| by which a man should regulate his conduct, are as infallible and absolute as |
| the truths of mathematics. How can the compasses teach these, merely because |
| one can draw circles with them, when a man can make a circle larger or smaller |
| at pleasure? How then does this use, to which one may put a circle, make it a |
| Great Light:' And why are an emblem of office and a circle of circumscription |
| placed together on the altar? |
| Does this explanation give a satisfactory reason for representing two of |
| the instruments used by carpenters and others as co-ordinate with the Book |
| which, lying open upon the altar, represents God Himself, between the two |
| cherubim, upon the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies, communicat- |
| ing His oracles to the human intellects of the priests, His inspired servants? |
| Would not the saw and hatchet have answered the purpose as well, or hammer |
| and chisel, or the plumb and level? The world is full of symbols, and any inge- |
| nious man can make any tool or implement a symbol by inventing explanations |
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| of it. But unless the symbol conceals some great cardinal truth, of morality, |
| philosophy or religion, what is its real and substantial value? It is only those |
| symbols which Masonry has inherited from the ancient ages, and which in |
| those ages taught the great truths of philosophy and religion to the few who |
| were adepts, that are of any value to Freemasonry. The rest are of no more |
| value than those of Odd Fellowship or the more modern orders, of no more |
| than the three links, the fasces and the tiger's claw.' |
| The three lesser lights are "the sun;' "the moon" and "the Master of |
| the Lodge" represented by the three altar lights. When these lights were |
| three times three, in the Master's Lodge, though only three in the Lodge of |
| Apprentices, and two in that of the Fellowcrafts, did the nine by threes still |
| represent the sun, moon and Master of the Lodge? And if so, how are the |
| three triads of lights appropriate? Is the sun properly represented by a triad? |
| or the moon? or the Master? |
| The "explanation" given in the Lodge, explaining nothing, is, "As the sun |
| rules the day and the moon governs the night, so ought the Master to rule and |
| govern his Lodge with equal regularity." Does this show how the sun or moon |
| is a light of the Lodge? The sun never shines into it: the moon can only do so |
| occasionally. Neither of them lights it. The explanation, expressed in other |
| words, is that the Master ought to be a light of his Lodge, ruling and governing |
| it with regularity, as the sun and moon are lights, not of the Lodge, but of the |
| outside World. Does that make them Lights of the Lodge? |
| No one can have a very exalted opinion of the symbolism of Masonry, who |
| hears it repeated to a man of thought and a scholar, a wise statesman, a learned |
| judge or an eminent divine, that from time immemorial there have been repre- |
| sented in every well-governed Lodge, a point within a circle: that the point rep- |
| resents an individual Brother, and the circle, the limits of his duty to God and |
| Man "beyond which he is never to encroach on any occasion"; that "this Circle |
| is bordered by two parallel and perpendicular lines emblematical" (how?) "of |
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| the two Saints John" and that "on the vertex rests the Holy Bible"; wherefore, |
| in going around the Circle, a Mason will not be able to deviate materially from |
| the rules of moral rectitude. |
| Why are the two columns surmounted by a terrestrial and celestial Globe? To |
| teach what lesson? To be symbolical of what? How can they be the appropriate |
| furniture of a room "representing the middle chamber of King Solomon's temple" |
| when it was not imagined by any one in the time of Solomon, that the earth was |
| a sphere, or that there was under the earth a sky, like that over it, the two forming |
| a hollow sphere? It would not be more anachronistic to ornament the hall with |
| pictures of steam-ships and railway cars, and style these "emblematical." |
| Who has ever clearly seen the meaning of the singular myth, that the |
| "True Word of a Master Mason" was only known, in the time of Solomon the |
| wise King of Israel, to him, to the King of Tsur [Tyre], and to Hiram, the half- |
| Hebrew half-Phoenician artisan, artificer, architect or Master? Was it revealed |
| to all of them or only to one and by him communicated to the others? |
| Why the meaning of the statement that these three had agreed with each |
| other never to give the Word, unless all three should be present; and that when |
| one of them was slain the other two could not give it and Solomon was afraid |
| it was "forever lost?" Why and how is it possible to give it, when the knowledge |
| of it was confined to two persons only? Sooner or later, one or the other would |
| die. If the possession of the Word was of inestimable value, why should the |
| knowledge of it have been limited to three persons? If there were other Master |
| Masons than these three, why were these others not also in possession of the |
| Word? And how was it considered possible that future ages might re-discover |
| the lost Word? |
| But, it being lost and only this vague hope remaining, Solomon declared |
| that the first word spoken at the grave should be used instead of it, taking the |
| chances of that the substitution of any insignificant and meaningless word for |
| the great and holy word. |

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| Did any of us hear this "first word spoken at the grave"? I did not hear |
| any word spoken except Solomon's exclamation, thrice repeated, "0 Lord! my |
| God! was there no help for the Widow's Son!" There was, afterwards, whispered |
| into my ear a word that I had never heard before, and I was told that it meant |
| "Marrow in the bone' surely no "substitute" for a sacred word. |
| Has the substitute-word any symbolic meaning? That it is a symbol, and |
| of the profoundest import, I know. But if it is, as Mackey made it, a word of |
| four syllables,' meaning, "What! Is this the builder?" I see no symbolism in it. It |
| is not a word embodying any great truth, any great religious doctrine, not to |
| be made known to the common people. What a poor, meager, pitiful outcome |
| it is, in a matter of so much solemnity and importance! What ausubstitute," for |
| the Great Ineffable Name of God!' |
| And to how many Masons have these thought occurred? In the minds of |
| how many has this story, so absurd if taken literally, stirred even a vague feeling |
| of curiosity? How many Masons have even suspected that something worth |
| knowing was hidden under the surface of the story? |
| Who has suspected that the apron of the Apprentice with its flap turned up |
| was a symbol, concealing the great and grand doctrine of the old Aryan religion?' |
| To whom, in the Lodge, has the origin of the peculiar sanctity of the |
| numbers three, five, seven and nine ever been made known? To whom has even |
| the suspicion been communicated that they may perhaps embody some pro- |
| found religious doctrine? Who has ever received any instruction that could |
| prevent his looking upon the disquisitions as to these numbers, and the |
| frequency of the occurrence of the numbers three and seven, and the various |
| combinations and singular properties of the number nine, as nothing more |
| than merely barren and idle babble, like the cat's-cradle combinations and |
| other puzzles of the children? |
| The religions of the world have always consisted, for the most part, in |
| worshipping the symbol, instead of that which is symbolized by it. Living |
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| creatures, inanimate things, words, ceremonial observances, numbers, have |
| all been symbols in their turn; and those of one creed, who have stigmatized, |
| persecuted, tortured and murdered those of another as idolaters, because they |
| superstitiously worshipped their own symbols, have always been themselves |
| idolaters, by the worship of other symbols, of the same or another kind. The |
| symbols of the wise have always become the idles of the vulgar. |
| We know of what the cross long ago became a symbol, and how it became |
| the object of superstitious adoration, as of itself possessing immense potencies, |
| giving health, safety, immunity to the faithful, and putting to flight the extrem- |
| ity of terror, the most powerful of devils. But how many know what it was |
| originally the symbol, thousands of years before Christianity borrowed it?9 |
| We know the symbolic meaning of the crescent for the Mohammedan, |
| and the keys of the Papal flag for the Roman Catholic, one the symbol of the |
| growth of Islamism:1° and the other, of the power of the successors of St. Peter |
| to lock and unlock the gates of Paradise. |
| Every Nation sees a great symbol in its flag; and the soldier is always |
| ready to give his life to prevent its falling in the hands of the enemy. A quarter |
| of a century ago one half of the United States was arrayed against the other |
| half, and a civil war of immense proportions broke out, and lasted four years, |
| because the stars upon the flag of the United States represented one thing to |
| one to part of the States and another thing to the others. |
| Of what was the pentalpha or five-pointed star with its unbroken lines a |
| symbol? Why were the interlaced double triangles called the "seal of Solomon," |
| possessing magical and miraculous powers? Undoubtedly they were sym- |
| bols—but of what? |
| That men of intelligence see nothing of value as the subject of study and |
| reflection in the symbols of the Blue Lodge ought not to seem strange to |
| anyone who reads the monitorial explanations. [Thomas Smith] Webb, to |
| whom Masonry is indebted(?) for the most of them, was profoundly ignorant |
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| of the ancient symbolism; of no reading in the Classics, knowing nothing in |
| regard to the old philosophers and the old religions. In permitting him to |
| explain her symbols, Masonry was as unfortunate as she has been in permit- |
| ting her jurisprudence to find for commentators only men of no knowledge of |
| the principles either of the English or Roman law: and those who have under- |
| taken to write upon the subject of Masonic symbolism have either kept within |
| the circle, traced by Webb, or indulged in the fantastic vagaries of astronomi- |
| cal interpretations, or in excursions into the boundless realms of fancy and |
| imagination, or have involved themselves in an incomprehensible network of |
| mathematical figures, a maze of circles, triangles, and other figures that no sane |
| human intellect can find a meaning in, in part intended to elucidate the 47th |
| problem of Euclid by an obtuse-angled triangle." |
| If any of those interpretations were correct, Masonic symbolism would |
| be useless. After hearing all, the question put by every sensible man will be |
| "cui honor [to what good?] "What of it all?" No scholar of any eminence has |
| ever been persuaded to think the symbolism of Masonry worth studying or |
| entitled to respectful consideration. The lessons of morality that they are |
| supposed to teach have found eloquent expounders; for they are comprehen- |
| sible by men of little or much learning alike; but so far as they are symbols |
| of religious or philosophical truth mute teachers of their religious thoughts, |
| of the men of the Aryan race" who, eager to learn the truth saw it, in part, |
| at least, as clearly as we do, they have had no interpreters; for vapid com- |
| monplace and dreary platitudes, and vague, aimless, fruitless babble are in |
| no sense interpretations. |
| Much of our ancient symbolism has disappeared moreover, and some it is |
| perhaps irretrievably lost. Like all ancient monuments, Masonry suffers from |
| the incessant gnawings of "the tooth of time:' The destruction of its symbol- |
| ism by omissions of what is not understood, by the innovations of ignorance |
| or that half-knowledge, even worse than ignorance, that is always coupled with |
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| self-conceit, and vulgarizes whatever it endeavors to improve, goes on continu- |
| ally. Of the instances of this, far too numerous, let us look at one. |
| Many years ago this question and answer were heard in the Lodge. |
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| "What induced you to become a Master Mason?" |
| "That I might obtain the Master's Word, and be therewith enabled |
| to travel into foreign countries and earn Master's Wages." |
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| The answer was profoundly symbolic. The "Master's Word" was the debar |
| yabavab,"the Word of God;' to know and comprehend, which is the great pur- |
| pose of a Mason, because it is the attainment of that Masonic Light, in search |
| of which he must ever journey from the West to the East. |
| But ignorance, seeing only the literal meaning of the words, fancied that |
| the sentence could be improved, by being made more practical; and so has by |
| degrees, made out of it this: |
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| "That I might obtain the Master's Word and therewith be |
| enabled to travel into foreign Countries and earn Master's wages, and |
| be thereby the better enabled to support my family and relieve the |
| widows and orphans of needy and distressed Brethren:' |
|  |
| And that was symbolic in the answer was thus annihilated: It was vulgar- |
| ized to the lowest degree, by being made to represent the whole value of the |
| "Word;' the verbum dei, to be to a Mason, to consist in its enabling him to find |
| employment and earn money-wages, a use to which it could be as profitably |
| prostituted by the most ignorant and brutish laborer, as by the most intellec- |
| tual Master of the Craft. |
| And yet, before any man could be made a Mason, he has been |
| required to state upon his honor that he hath no such purpose in view |
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| in seeking to be initiated; and the Senior Warden, required to make this |
| answer, is required to say that in his preliminary declaration he lied, and |
| obtained initiation by fraud. |
| And, also, as no Master has for half a century or more received the |
| "Master's Word;' the Freemasonry of the Blue Lodge having, no longer ago |
| than that ceased to be Freemasonry, by parting with it, and permitting another |
| "Order" or Degree to become owner of it by process ordinarily called theft," |
| the Masonry so mutilated neither receiving a price for that of which it was dis- |
| seized, nor even uttering a protest—therefore the Senior Warden, speaking for |
| all the Brethren, in saying that he was "induced" to become a Master Mason for |
| the purpose of obtaining the Master's Word, which neither he nor they have |
| ever obtained, proclaims that he and they were induced to become Masters by |
| false promises and fraudulent misrepresentations. |
| Not being able to wink so hard as not to see this, nor seeing any other way |
| of escape from this humiliating position, resort has been had, in California and |
| more than one State besides, to the expedient of omitting the words "obtain |
| the Master's Word;' and "thereby;' retaining still the declaration of ignoble and |
| unlawful purpose, in the "amended" phrase, "That I might be enabled to travel |
| into foreign countries;' &c. |
| Who hears now the first answer outside of South Carolina, where it has |
| been made for a hundred years and more to the question, |
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| "Whence came you and whither do you travel?" |
| "From the high place of Gibeon to the threshing-floor of Oman |
| the Jebusiter" |
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| and who, even in South Carolina, knows what the real meaning of the answer is? |
| Who, in this Country, for the last hundred years, has heard in the Lodge |
| the questions and answers, |
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| "Have you seen your Master today?" |
| "I have." |
| "How was he clothed?" |
| "In blue and gold:' |
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| (or, when Masons met early in the 18th Century, in taverns and inns, to smoke |
| pipes and drink ale), |
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| "In a blue Jacket and yellow pair of Breeches.:'ls |
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| and who knows what the answer meant? |
| We have all bound ourselves by oath to do certain things, "if within length |
| of our cable-tow;' those only excepted, if any, who received the degrees in places |
| where, because its meaning was not known, it has been elided from the work. |
| How many of us know what it means? How many even thought it worthwhile |
| to inquire? Who is there, of those who did inquire, even if of his initiator, that |
| did not find him of whom he inquired, as completely as ignorant as himself? |
| Thus, a man is made to swear, by as solemn a form of oath as can be invented, |
| that he will do certain things, under a condition which has no meaning to him, |
| and the meaning of which is equally unknown to him who administers the |
| oath. Is it not almost a crime to so swear a man? |
| How many of us have attached any particular significance to the con- |
| tinual recurrence of the number three in the ceremonies of the Blue degrees? |
| or been moved by that recurrence to a desire to know why it so recurs, |
| and what connection if any, that number has with the other symbols of |
| the degrees? Numbers, as well as words and things, are symbols; and this |
| number has always been regarded as of special sanctity. It is represented by |
| the triangle of equal sides, and by one of the sides of the right-angled tri- |
| angle, as four, the number of the square, is by another of the sides, and five |
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| by another; and seven by three added to four, the triangle upon the square, |
| with one line belonging to both." |
| In the Scottish and French Rites, the cable-tow is placed not once only, but |
| three times around the neck of the candidate. |
| He obtains admission into the Lodge by three knocks. Having entered, |
| he makes three circuits around the Lodge; halting while making each, at each |
| of the three stations of the Master and Wardens, his haltings thus mean three |
| times three: |
| When he is brought to light, he beholds the three Great Lights of the |
| Lodge, by the light of the three representatives of the three Lesser Lights. |
| He learns afterwards that the Lodge has three principal officers, represen- |
| tatives of Wisdom, Strength and Beauty, the Divine Wisdom, the Divine Power |
| and the Divine Word: |
| That the Lodge has three principal ornaments, three jewels moveable and |
| three immovable; three articles of furniture; three columns; three windows; three |
| degrees; that three years are the term of service and age of an Apprentice; that |
| the mystical ladder has three rounds;" that the Word of the third Degree is |
| of three syllables," like the password of one of the words of the Fellowcraft's |
| Degree; that all signs are threefold, right-angles, horizontals and perpendicu- |
| lars, and in the distress sign are three droppings of the arms. |
| But when and where was the attention of the initiate ever called to these |
| coincidences," and his reflection upon them demanded? |
| I have often and in various places repeated to Master Masons, in Lodge |
| and in Grand Lodge assembled, the lessons of the Masonic symbolism that |
| will be found written in the following pages of this manuscript. I have found |
| that even by intelligent men, and men deeply interested in the subject, explana- |
| tions given by me have been so imperfectly remembered that they have begged |
| me to repeat them by letter; and I may safely affirm that no one, of all who have |
| heard these lessons (never yet written down, and never twice delivered in the |
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| same language, or twice confined to the same points and illustrations), could |
| possibly write out half of them, even in substance. |
| It has been urged upon me, again and again, that if I do not write them |
| out they will be lost when I die; and knowing this to be true, and that the day |
| of my death must soon come, I address myself to the task of providing for the |
| preservation of that which, by study and reflection, I have discovered in regard |
| to the symbols of the Blue Lodge; especially charging those to whom what I |
| am writing shall be entrusted, now and in all time to come, never to permit the |
| multiplication of copies of this book, or any part of it by printing, and forbid- |
| ding the supplying of any copy of it or any part of it in manuscript even, to |
| anyone who is not fit and qualified to teach and instruct his Brethren, and who |
| does not propose to use it as their teacher and instructor. This is the positive |
| and preemptory condition upon which I consent to write it, and I pray that |
| misfortune and ignominy may befall anyone who set at naught this condition. |
| Washington, February loth, 1887. |
| Albert Pike |
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