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PART X—THE LETTER G

I



THE LETTER G is so intimately related to the symbolism of the Middle Chamber and all connected therewith that it will be wise, just here, to attempt an explanation of that mysterious letter. "Mysterious" is used advisedly because there has been very little agreement among our scholars either as to its origin or to its meaning. Usually we can hit upon the manner in which a symbol was introduced into the ritual by studying the records of the early eighteenth century in England at which time and place the ritual was cast in its modern form, but such a study can not help us here because the eighteenth century Masons were themselves confused about the matter. This confusion survives to our own day with some authorities holding to one theory, others to its opposite, and still others, like the Grand Master of one American Jurisdiction, inclined to throw the symbol out altogether. Mackey, who was always so conservative, was quite as radical as this Grand Master, as is witnessed by this statement: "It is to be regretted that this letter G as a symbol was ever admitted into the Masonic system."

II

One writer believes that the G stands for the Greek rendering of "geometry"; another, that it is the initial of the Greek name for "square"; Brother J. T. Lawrence thinks that it may be an old Egyptian snake emblem; others hold that it was originally the square made "gallows shape," and that this gradually became corrupted into a G. The most common theories, however, are that it stands for Geometry, or that it is the initial of our word "God." It will be necessary to examine these last interpretations more at length, for the evidence seems to favor one or the other, or perhaps both together.

One cannot read the old Masonic Constitutions without being struck by the prominence given to Geometry in their descriptions of Masonry. The oldest copy of them makes Masonry to spring from Geometry, as may be seen in the following excerpt:

"On this manner, thru good wit of geometry
Began first the Craft of Masonry."

Brother Hextall (A. Q. C., vol. 25, p. 97) has pointed out that in every one of the hundred or more copies of these Old Charges, or Old Constitutions, Geometry is placed first among sciences. How can we account for this? The most reasonable explanation would seem to be that Operative Masonry was nothing other than applied Geometry. The builder in that early day had no architectural handbook, no blue prints, no tables of construction; his art was based on Geometry alone,

and his skill consisted in knowing by heart many of the processes of Geometry, and his secrets were nothing other than these same processes and the knowledge of supplying them. This being the case, it was natural that he should hold his science in high reverence and make its name, represented by its initial letter, to serve as a symbol in his lodge. Such, at any rate, is the reading of the matter as held by a majority of our best modern scholars.

III

These scholars believe that when Freemasonry became stagnant in the seventeenth century, so that very few lodges remained in existence, Freemasons themselves lost the old explanation of the letter G though they retained the symbol because it was so essential a part of the system which they inherited. This, so it is believed, accounts for the confused explanations made by eighteenth century writers.

IV

How did the letter G ever come to stand for Deity? It is almost impossible to answer this question with any degree of certainty, because the available evidence is so slender, but it is thought by some that an explanation may be found in the connection between Freemasonry and Kabbalism, for it is believed that some of the non-operatives "accepted" by the lodges in the seventeenth century brought a certain amount of Kabbala with them.

The symbolic system of the Kabbala centered about the Divine Name. According to ancient Jewish traditions the real name of God, given to the Jewish people through Moses, was not permitted to be written, except with the consonants only. At the time of the exile the pronunciation, and consequently the true spelling, of the Holy Name was lost. The consonants, J. H. W. H. remained, but what the vowels were nobody could discover; to find the Lost Name became one of the great ambitions of Jewish priests and scholars, and this search became one of the principal subjects in the literature of the Kabbala. Not having the name itself the Kabbalists were wont to inscribe a Hebrew "Y" (Yod) in the center of a triangle with equal sides and make this stand for it.

It is supposed that this symbol was brought into Masonry by the non-operatives who were Kabbalists, but that in the course of time the common men who made up the lodges substituted for the Hebrew initial of the Divine Name, the English initial. Inasmuch as the initial letter of God was the same as the initial letter of Geometry the two symbols became confused, and at last the old Masonic meaning of G was forgotten.

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V

If this history of the matter be correct—I have pieced it together from the opinions expressed by many of our most learned scholars—I do not see that we need to make any choice between G as standing for Geometry and G as standing for Deity; the two conceptions merge naturally because men have always seen in the Geometry which is everywhere found in nature the clearest unveiling of the Infinite Mind. The Greek philosopher, Pythagoras, who was the first man to raise Geometry to the rank of a science, built his philosophical system on numbers and their relations. "All things are in numbers," he said, "the world is living arithmetic in its development—a realized geometry in its repose." Of a similar mind was Plato, king of Greek philosophers. When asked how God spends his time, he replied, "God is always geometrizing." "Geometry rightly treated is the knowledge of the Eternal." "Geometry must ever tend to draw the soul towards the truth."

In spite of the enormous increase in knowledge we who live twenty-five hundred years after those thinkers can still agree with them; science has only made more apparent the lucid order, the geometric symmetry of the universe. The very elements of which matter is composed group themselves together in regular order; crystals are a solid geometry; the plant, the tree, the construction of an insect's wing, are all symmetrical in their proportion and rhythmical in their motions; the stars move in curves, the wildest comet inscribes a spiral, and the whole universe is one vast realm of order and design. Surely, where there is so much order, there must be an Orderer!

As science builds itself on the orderliness of nature so does Masonry seek to build itself upon the equally certain laws of the human mind. Human beings are not exceptions to the universal reign of law. These are laws of brotherhood, laws of love, laws of the ideal, as certain in their operations and as undeviating in their processes as the law of gravity. When men learn these laws, and when they adjust their actions to them, they will discover that the face of God has been made plain—they will have learned the secret of the letter G.

SKELETON OR OUTLINE FOR LODGE HISTORIES

With a view to uniformity and comprehensiveness, and to assist those brethren appointed to prepare their lodge histories, we suggest the following skeleton or outline of the work, which should be varied according to circumstances. And we here remark that all members of the lodge should lend their assistance and co-operation in this work, especially in gathering up the facts which do not appear in the lodge records.

CHAPTER I

Section 1—Geographical location, surroundings, history, population, development and general condition, social and otherwise, of the community.

Section 2—Preliminary steps to formation of the lodge. Names of the Brethren actively concerned in the movement, and of those who signed the petition for the dispensation, or charter, their occupations, Masonic records and brief biographies. Other particulars of interest connected with them or the lodge in its early stages.

Section 3—If an old lodge, formed prior to the adoption of

the present form, a full copy of the petition, with signatures, would doubtless be of interest. Give name and number of the lodge that recommended the petition.

Section 4—To what Grand Master or Deputy Grand Master the petition was presented, his action thereon and the date. Names of the Brethren appointed Master and Wardens of the new lodge.

Section 5—When, by whom, and in what building, the lodge was opened under dispensation. Minutes of the first several meetings, or copious extracts or summaries thereof, showing how the new lodge started off.

Section 6—If an old lodge, chartered prior to adoption of present form, a full copy, with signatures, of the petition for a charter. To what Communication of the Grand Lodge was it presented, when and where did the Grand Lodge meet, the report of the Committee on Lodges Under Dispensation, or other committee, thereon, and the action of the Grand Lodge. If refused, follow up the doings of the lodge till the charter was granted.

Section 7—Where, by whom and in what building, was the lodge constituted? Names of its officers given in the charter and installed, minutes or summary thereof and the social or other functions incident to the occasion (if any).

Section 8—Any facts of general Masonic, historical or local interest connected with the experiences and progress of the lodge and of Masons in the community. Copious summaries of the minutes might be of service.

CHAPTER II

Section 1—List of all the Worshipful Masters of the lodge and the year in which each was elected and installed, in chronological order.

Section 2—A roll, in chronological order, of all the members of the lodge since its first organization, those "made" Master Masons by the lodge in one column, those affiliated in another.

Section 3—A list of all Brethren who have died while members of the lodge, with date of death, and noting observance of the burial service (if any), with names of officers performing same and other Brethren present.

Section 4—A brief historical account of the several lodge rooms occupied, the time of the occupancy of each, and the circumstances connected with or causing the changes, the leasing or building of each. A mention of any of the old lodge furniture or appurtenances might be of interest.

Section 5—All traditions of interest connected with the lodge, especially in the early days, and contemporaneous events in the community in which the lodge or any of the Brethren were directly or indirectly concerned.

CHAPTER III

Section 1—Note time and circumstances connected with each visit of a Grand Officer, including the District Deputy Grand Master, to the lodge and the social functions (if any) incident thereto.

Section 2—If the lodge was named for other than the town or some noted historical or Biblical character, explain the circumstances with biography of the namesake (if a person) or history of the case.

Section 3—Biographical sketches of other prominent and deserving members of the lodge, past and present, but avoiding fulsome praises of the living.

Section 4—Special mention of any member or members of the lodge who have held office in any of the Grand Bodies of Masonry in Texas or elsewhere (before coming here), or in the public service, local, state or national.

CHAPTER IV

Section 1—Accounts with dates and full particulars, including officers, members present, etc., of all notable functions or events in the lodge, public or private, such as:

- (a) St. John's Day celebrations and public installations.
- (b) Cornerstone ceremonies.
- (c) Any others, Masonic, patriotic, etc.

CHAPTER V

Section 1—Brief mention of other Masonic bodies, in same town or county, with date of charter and other particulars.

To these outlines could be added other features of interest, especially of things not preserved in Printed Proceedings of the Grand Lodge.

—Grand Lodge Proceedings, Texas.