



Brethren

The Volume of the Sacred Law is known to us as a Great Light in Masonry. We have been accustomed to think of the Holy Book as one book because it is bound between two covers. It is not one book, it is a large library, sometimes called the Divine Library and rightly so. It is composed of 66 separate volumes, thirty nine of which comprise the Old Testament and twenty seven the New Testament.

It was over 1500 years in the making and a period of about 400 years passed between the history of the last book in the Old Testament and the first book of the New. Another period of four hundred years passed before they were translated by St. Jerome into a common language, and assembled into one collection. This was known as Latin Vulgate. Another 10 centuries passed before the first crude and partial translation in English appeared, which is the basis from which our present authorized version under King James in 1611A.D is used.

The Holy Bible contains Law, history, poetry, prophecy, letters, morals, ethics, philosophy, medicine and a revelation of divine light and truth. Its authorship is not less varied. Its contributors were lawyers, Kings, historians, poets, prophets, tent makers and fishermen.

The Bible is properly called a Great light of Masonry for from the centre of the Lodge it pours forth upon the East, the West and the South its refulgent rays of Divine truth. The Bible is used among Masons as a symbol of the will of God, however it may be expressed. Therefore, whatever symbol to any people expresses that will, may be used as a substitute for the Bible in a Masonic Lodge. Thus, in a Lodge consisting entirely of Jews, the Old Testament alone may be placed upon the altar, and Muslim Masons make use of the Koran. Whether it be the Gospels to the Christian, the Pentateuch to the Israelite, the Koran to the Muslims, or the Vedas to the Brahman, it everywhere Masonically conveys the same idea - that of the symbolism of the Devine Will revealed to man.

The history of the Masonic symbolism of the Bible is interesting. It is referred to in the manuscripts before the revival as the book upon which the covenant was taken, but it was never referred to as a great light. In the old ritual, of which a copy from the Royal Library of Berlin is given by Krause, there is no mention of the Bible as one of the lights. Preston made it a part of the furniture of the Lodge; but in rituals of about 1760 it is described as one of the three great lights. In the American and Canadian systems, the Bible is both a piece of furniture and a great light.

Everything that could be done has been done in the ages of intolerance to destroy it. Men have been imprisoned, tortured and burned at the stake for declaring and confessing its teachings. When Latimer and Ridley were burned in front of Old Bailey College, Oxford for defending it, Latimer cried out “Fear not Ridley our blood this day will light a torch that will never go out”

Its pages have been moistened these hundreds of years by tears of joy and tears of sorrow. They have been thumbed and soiled by the fingers of Kings in their palaces and prisoners in their cells. All have found it a source of strength, courage hope and consolation.

Sir Walter Scott on his death bed called to Lockhart (who is recognized as the leading biographer on the life of Scott) “Bring me my book” “Which book?” inquired Lockhart, to which Scott replied “There is only one book” and he passed away with his hands resting upon the Bible.

Our Grand Jurisdiction has adopted the King James version of the Bible as the REPRESENTATIVE VOSL to be used by our lodges. (However a few lodges have adopted another book of faith instead.) For those lodges who use the King James version, it must always be present and open (at the appropriate selection) whenever a lodge is open. Whatever his faith, this book is always “involved” when a candidate is taking an obligation.

It is quite in order, however, to obligate a candidate on a personal VOSL of his choosing. This personal VOSL is usually presented to the candidate at the conclusion of the degree and is his to retain forever.

A candidate can be obligated on the Lodge VOSL, a VOSL of his choosing, or a token of his faith. This second VOSL or token of his faith is placed on top of the Lodge VOSL and under the S and C. (It is “sandwiched” between them.) If this second VOSL is also a King James version of the Bible, it is opened to the same page as the Lodge VOSL. Should it be the holy book of another faith, then it is opened at a place of the candidate’s choosing, i.e. a place he considers important to him.

In the First Degree, the candidate’s L.H. is placed under the Lodge VOSL and his R.H. on top of the S and C, so both VOSL and the S and C are “sandwiched” between his hands.

The candidate’s personal VOSL is usually closed at the end of his obligation and removed from the Lodge VOSL. It can be left on the altar for the rest of the evening, until it is presented to the candidate.

These days it is not uncommon for a lodge to have brethren as members who belong to different faiths. A lodge can recognize this by placing a VOSL of another faith on the altar. This other VOSL would not be opened, nor would it be placed on top of the Lodge VOSL. It would merely be placed at the front edge of the altar, in front of the Lodge VOSL. Before a lodge can adopt this procedure, however, it must first amend its Bylaws accordingly.

It is a matter of extreme importance that we extend this courtesy to our members, and honour our commitment to universality

And so my brethren I urge you to read it frequently, not with your eyes but with your heart. It will be an ever increasing source of guidance and light in your efforts to become a better man and a better Mason

Other lights may fail; this light will not fail. As you increase your knowledge of it so it will become a lamp under your feet and a light unto your path.

In the theme of Masonry making good men better I would like to leave you with this quote from our own M.W. Bro. Hugh Murray :-

“I dare not say that a bad man may not be a mason, but I am very bold in saying that a good Mason cannot be a bad man.”

Thank you Brethren,

R.W. Bro. John K. Johnston