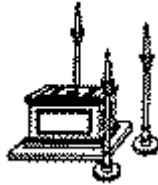


Dufferin Lodge No. 291

April 19, 2012

LESSER LIGHTS



When an initiate is first brought back into the light in a Masonic Lodge, the radiance come from the Lesser Lights, which form a triangle about the Altar. It seems, at first, rather odd that so great and important a symbol should receive such scant attention in the ritualistic body of Freemasonry.

We are instructed that they are called Lesser Lights, that they are placed in a triangle, that by their light we may see other objects, that they represent the Sun, Moon and Worshipful Master, for certain reasons which are rather briefly explained . . . and that is all! Later on we learn, more by example than by precept, more by custom than by law, that Lesser Lights are always lit when a lodge is opened. Even when their flames do not really burn they are constructively burning. But nowhere in our ritual are we told much of anything as to why all these things are so; how the Lesser Lights came to be; what their hidden, covered, secret, symbolic meaning is.

And you shall search through many a Masonic volume and tome and find no more information on the Lesser Lights than the ritual gives. Mackey, the great authority, is unusually brief, and beyond drawing a parallel to the use of the seven branched candelabra as described in the Great Light, and stating that their use in Masonry is very old, they appearing in print in references to Masonry in the

seventeenth century, adds practically nothing to the ritual explanations.

And yet it could not be possible that so important a symbol could have no more soul than is given in the few words we devote to it. It seems obvious that it is one of those symbols in Freemasonry . . . of which there are so many! . . . which the individual brother is supposed to examine and translate for himself, getting from it what he can, and enjoying what he gets in direct proportion to the amount of labor and thought he is willing to devote to the process of extracting the meaning from the outer covering.

Immediately after the Lesser Lights are named, our attention is directed to the fact that they are in a triangle about the Altar. In some Jurisdictions they are closely about the Altar; in others, one is placed at each of the stations of the three principal officers.

In some lodges the three Lesser Lights form a right, in others an equilateral; in others an isosceles triangle. What is uniform through out the Masonic World is the triangular formation about the Altar; what is different is the shape and size of the triangle. Of course, it is not possible to place three lights to form anything else but a triangle, or a straight line and they cannot be made to form a square or a star. Which brings us to the first question as to why are there three Lesser Lights, and not two or four?

There are a number of reasons. Any thinking brother has already discovered that there is "Three" throughout the whole system of Ancient Craft Masonry; three degrees, three steps, three ancient Grand Masters; and so on. It will be no surprise to recall that three is the first of the great Sacred Numbers of the ancient Mysteries, and that it is the numerical symbol of God. While many religions of many ages and peoples have conceived of Divinity as a trinity, the figure three as a symbol of God is far older than any trinitarian doctrine. It comes from the triangle, which is the first possible figure made up of straight lines which is without either beginning

or ending. One line, or two lines have ends. They start and finish. The triangle, like the square or the five or more sided figure, has no loose ends. and the triangle is the first of these which can be made; as God was always considered as first; and also as without either beginning or ending, the triangle itself soon became a symbol of Deity.

Sun worship was among the first of religions; let him who knows lay down the facts as to whether sun worship preceded fire worship, or fire worship that of the sun. To us it does not matter. Sun worship is far, far older than any recorded history; it goes back, far back, into the first dim mists which obscure the very first beginnings of intelligence. So it was only natural that the early worshipers should set a light beside their Altar or Holy place and name it for the sun.

Albert Pike was a very great and a very learned man. He stated "They are still the three lights of a Masonic Lodge, except that for Mercury, the Master of the Lodge has been absurdly substituted." To him Freemasonry owes a debt greater, perhaps, than to any other who ever lived; he gave her study, he brought forth her poetry, he interpreted her symbols, he defined her truths, he made plain much that she had concealed. But Pike himself defended the right of Masons to study and interpret the symbols of Freemasonry for themselves. So he contends that there is no absurdity in Freemasonry taking the ancient lights which symbolized the Sun, Moon and Mercury, and making them stand for the Sun, Moon and Worshipful Master of His Lodge..

The Worshipful Master rules and governs his lodge as truly as the sun and Moon rule the day and night. There can be no lodge without a Worshipful Master; he is, in a very real sense, the lodge itself. There are some things he cannot do that the brethren, under him, can do. But, without him the brethren can do nothing, while he, without the brethren's consent or even their assistance, can do

much. It is one of the principal functions of the Worshipful Master to disseminate light - Masonic Light - to his lodge So that the inclusion of a symbol of the Worshipful Master, as a giver of light, is to most of us neither fanciful nor absurd, but a logical carrying out of that Masonic doctrine which makes a Master a Giver of Light to his brethren.

A lesson is taught in the references to regularity of the heavenly luminaries, as guides for the government of a lodge by the worshipful Master. The fact that the Moon is not “Regular” in her attendance upon the sun, or the night, and that she does not, in any such sense as does the sun, “govern” that period of darkness in which she appears, in no way detracts from the force of these admonitions. For these phrases are very old, and go back to a time when men knew much less of astronomy than they do today; to a time when the moon, in popular belief, had much greater powers than she actually possesses. We know the moon to have almost no effect upon the earth, as far as our lives are concerned, save as she makes the tides. Our ancient brethren believed her light to be full of weird and wonderful powers;

“Moon-Struck” and “Lunatic” (from luna, the moon) are symbol words of these ancient and now exploded beliefs. Less than two hundred years ago, many crimes, misdemeanors, beneficent influences and beautiful actions were ascribed to the moon; things evil had to be done “in the dark of the moon;” witches were supposed to ride in moonlight; dogs bayed at the moon because by its light they could see what was hidden from mortal eyes; sheeted ghosts preferred moonlight to star light; incantations were never properly recited unless in the moonlight, and the moon gave or withheld crops, influenced the weather and, when eclipsed, foretold disaster.

With such a body of belief it is not surprising that the moon was considered, even by the educated, to have “governing” powers, whence, probably, her inclusion with such abilities into our ritual.

As the sun, in its gravity, causes the earth to revolve around it in three-hundred and sixty-five and a fraction days, and the moon revolves about the earth in approximately twenty-eight days, and the Worshipful Master rules and directs his lodge in all directions as depicted on his collar with great wisdom, so the earth is never without light, and our lodges are never without direction, as it is always meant to be.

Thank you Brethren

R.W. Bro. John K. Johnston