

Carl H. Claudy, 33° A classic Masonic writing offers insights for every age.

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Illustrious Carl Harry Claudy, 33°, Past Grand Master, 1943, Grand Lodge, District of Columbia

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"I have been a Mason for a year now," remarked the Young Brother to the Old Past Master. "While I find a great deal in Masonry to enjoy and like the fellows and all that, I am more or less in the dark as to what good Masonry really is in the world. I don't mean I can't appreciate its charity or its fellowship, but it seems to me that I don't get much out of it. I can't really see why it has any function outside of the relationship we enjoy in the Lodge and the charitable acts we do."

"I think I could win an argument about you," smiled the Past Master.

"An argument about me?"

"Yes. You say you have been a Master Mason for a year. I think I could prove to the satisfaction of a jury of your peers, who would not need to be Master Masons, that while you are a Lodge member in good standing, you are not a Master Mason."

"I don't think I quite understand," puzzled the Young Mason. "I was quite surely initiated, passed, and raised. I have my certificate and my good standing card. I attend Lodge regularly. I do what work I am assigned. If that isn't being a Master Mason, what is?"

"You have the body but not the spirit," retorted the Old Past Master. "You eat the husks and disregard the kernel. You know the ritual and fail to understand its meaning. You carry the documents, but for you they attest but an empty form. You do not understand the first underlying principle, which makes Masonry the great force she is. And yet, in spite of it, you enjoy her blessings, which is one of her miracles. A man may love and profit by what he does not comprehend."

"I just don't understand you at all. I am sure I am a good Mason."

"No man is a good Mason who thinks the Fraternity has no function beyond pleasant association in the Lodge and charity. There are thousands of Masons who seldom see the inside of a Lodge and, therefore, miss the fellowship. There are thousands who never need or support her charity and so never come in contact with one of its many features. Yet these may take freely and largely from the treasure house which is Masonry.

"Masonry, my young friend, is an opportunity. It gives a man a chance to do and to be, among the world of men, something he otherwise could not attain. No man kneels at the altar of Masonry and rises again the same man. At the altar something is taken from him never to return—his feelings of living for himself alone. Be he ever so selfish, ever so self-centered, ever so much an individualist, at the altar he leaves behind him some of the dross of his purely profane make-up.

"No man kneels at the altar of Masonry and rises the same man because, in the place where the dross and selfish were, is put a little of the most Divine spark which men may see. Where was the self-interest is put an interest in others. Where was the egotism is put love for one's fellow man. You say that the 'Fraternity has no function.' Man, the Fraternity performs the greatest function of any institution at work among men in that it provides a common meeting ground where all of us—be our creed, our social position, our wealth, our ideas, our station in life what they may—may meet and understand one another.

"What caused the Civil War? Failure of one people to understand another and an inequality of men which this country could not endure. What caused the Great War? Class hatred. What is the greatest leveler of class in the world? Masonry. Where is the only place in which a capitalist and laborer, socialist and democrat, fundamentalist and modernist, Jew and Gentile, sophisticated and simple alike meet and forget their differences? In a Masonic Lodge, through the influence of Masonry. "Masonry, which opens her portals to men because they are men, not because they are wealthy or wise or foolish or great or small but because they seek the brotherhood which only she can give.

"Masonry has no function? Why, son, the function of charity, great as it is, is the least of the things Masonry does. The fellowship in the Lodge, beautiful as it is, is at best not much more than one can get in any good club, association, or organization. These are the beauties of Masonry, but they are also beauties of other organizations. The great fundamental beauty of Masonry is all her own. She, and only she, stretches a kindly and loving hand around the world, uniting millions in a bond too strong for breaking. Time has demonstrated that Masonry is too strong for war, too strong for hate, too strong for jealousy and fear. The worst of men have used the strongest of means and have but pushed Masonry to one side for the moment; not all their efforts have broken her, or ever will!

"Masonry gives us all a chance to do and to be; to do a little, however humble the part, in making the world better; to be a little larger, a little fuller in our lives, a little nearer to the G.A.O.T.U. And unless a man understands this, believes it, takes it to his heart, and lives it in his daily life, and strives to show it forth to others in his every act—unless he live and love and labor in his Masonry—I say he is no Master Mason; aye, though he belong to all Rites and carry all cards, though he be hung as a Christmas tree with jewels and pins, though he be an officer in all Bodies. But the man who has it in his heart and sees in Masonry the chance to be in reality what he has sworn he would be, a brother to his fellow Masons, is a Master Mason though he be raised but tonight, belongs to no body but his Blue Lodge, and be too poor to buy and wear a single pin."

The Young Brother, looking down, unfastened the emblem from his coat lapel and handed it to the Old Past Master. "Of course, you are right," he said, lowly. "Here is my pin. Don't give it back to me until you think I am worthy to wear it."

The Old Past Master smiled. "I think you would better put it back now," he answered gently. "None are more fit to wear the Square and Compasses than those who know themselves unworthy, for they are those who strive to be real Masons."

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Ill. Carl H. Claudy, P.G.M., 33°, wrote the above essay in 1924. One of America's most noteworthy Masonic authors, Most Worshipful Claudy was the Executive Secretary of the Masonic Service Association from 1929 to 1957. He was raised in Harmony Lodge No. 17, Washington, D.C., in 1908, serving as Master in 1932 and Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia in 1943. Before his passing on May 27, 1957, he wrote many "Short Talk Bulletins", essays, and plays, among them The Lion's Paw, The Master's Book, and The Rose Upon the Altar.