

# hoodwink

In spite of the ritual only a very literal-minded man can imagine that the hoodwink is for the purpose of concealing the lodge room and the brethren from the initiate until he is obligated.

The architect who designed the building; the workmen who erected the walls; the laborers who laid the carpet; the electricians who put in the wires; the painters who decorated the ceiling; the craftsmen who built the altar and the chairs; the charwomen who sweep and dust, all have seen the lodge room. The Entered Apprentice is hoodwinked before he enters a Fellowcraft lodge; the Fellowcraft is again hoodwinked before he enters a Master Mason lodge; yet he *has* seen the lodge room, of course, in his first degree. Therefore, his hoodwink is not to conceal a lodge, but is a symbol.

Of what a hoodwink and darkness are symbols is the subject of these pages.

In all systems of initiation, darkness has been a symbol of ignorance; hence, ritual that the eye should not see until the heart has conceived the mysteries of the order. In the Ancient Mysteries, the aspirant was always shrouded in darkness as a preparatory step to the reception of the full light of knowledge. The time of this confinement in darkness and solitude varied in the different mysteries. Among the Druids of Britain, the period was nine days and nights; in the Grecian Mysteries, it was three times nine days; while among the Persians, it was extended to the almost incredible period of fifty days of darkness, solitude and fasting.

Because darkness is thought of as existing before light was created, it was originally worshipped as the firstborn, as the progenitor of day and the state of existence before creation. The apostrophe of Edward Young to *Night* embodies the feelings that gave origin to this debasing worship of darkness.

O majestic night!  
Natures great ancestor! Days elder born!  
And fated to survive the transient Sun!  
By mortals and immortals seen with awe!

In the Old Testament, and in many other ancient documents, religions, and philosophies, darkness is symbolic not only of ignorance, but of sin, evil, wrong.

This is not so of the Masonic darkness of the hoodwink. Evil, sin, and wrong, being voluntary, are the result of going against knowledge. There is no thought in any Masonic degree that a candidate is or does evil; the hoodwink is not voluntary. The candidate submits to the hoodwink because the degree requires him to do so. It is a requirement to emphasize *ignorance* now, and *knowledge* to *come*, not *sin* now, and *redemption* to come.

The distinction needs no laboring here, but must be stated: a Freemason's darkness indicates only a helpfulness to emphasize the worth of knowledge; in a lodge it is not used to emphasize a moral regeneration.

Candidates for Freemasonry are already moral men, or they could not be candidates!

There is so much ritual in the Great Light and so many Biblical references in Masonic ceremonies that the neophyte can easily be overwhelmed with the dependence of Masonry on Holy Writ. But among the many apposite Biblical words that are *not* used in the ceremonies, none strike a more resounding bell-like note than these from that ever-quotable poet, Isaiah: "I will give thee the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places." (Isaiah 45:3)

"Treasures of darkness" — those treasures that the Entered Apprentice receives while he is in darkness; the "hidden riches of secret places" — the riches he receives later in the ceremony when he is indeed permitted to kneel in "the secret places" of Freemasonry.

Without the darkness he could neither see nor appreciate the light; the "darkness" of unseeing eyes is itself a treasure in the lessons it teaches of dependence, of friendly hands, of an unveiling to come, of a new knowledge.

Before that unveiling there is "darkness on the face of the deep." The darkness is emphasized in the degree. And what dispelled it? "The spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." He has a poorly equipped mind who cannot feel in these sentences the very heart of Freemasonry; that only by a knowledge of and a dependence upon the Great Architect is illumination possible. Especially Masonic illumination, which, presumably, he so states, that is what a candidate desires and requires. Darkness on the face of the deep — the spirit of the Great Architect moving to dispel it — here is a great and solemn explanation of the hoodwink and its removal, a reminder of the "treasures of darkness" of Isaiah and the "hidden riches of secret places" the Entered Apprentice is given as a precious possession to have all his life long.

A further ritual reference to darkness is found in the account of the situation of the Temple of Solomon, on the northern walls of which the sun at meridian never shone. The North is therefore, Masonically, a place of darkness. East, of course, is the place of light; the Northeast corner, a "place of beginning" because half way between the effulgence of light in the East and the North from which the sun never shines.

Non-Masonic literature, especially in the realms of the poet and the essayist, teems with references to darkness. Edmund Burke said: "Darkness is more productive of sublime ideas than light." George Eliot sang of "O, radiant dark! O, darkly fostered ray, thou hast a joy too deep for shallow day!" Alfred Tennyson wrote: "And out of darkness came the hands that reach through nature, molding man"; a reference, of course, to the Great Artisan. "Darkness," says George Oliver, "was an emblem of death, and death was a prelude to resurrection. It will be at once seen, therefore, in what manner the doctrine of the resurrection was inculcated and exemplified in these remarkable institutions." Death and the resurrection were the doctrines taught in the Ancient Mysteries; sacred awe and reverence that these doctrines

ought always to inspire in the rational and contemplative mind. The same doctrine forms the groundwork of Freemasonry; therefore, darkness, night, the blindfold, are the appropriate accompaniments to preparation as a symbol of chaos from whence light issued at the Divine command. Temporary hoodwinks are reminders of the state of nonentity before birth, and of ignorance before the reception of knowledge. In the Ancient Mysteries, the release of the aspirant from solitude and darkness was called the *act of regeneration*. He was said to be born again, or to be raised from the dead. In Freemasonry, when the darkness that envelops both eyes and mind of the uninitiated is removed, Freemasons are appropriately called the *sons of light*.

Oliver lectured on “The Mysterious Darkness of the Third Degree,” referring to the ceremony of enveloping the *room* in darkness when the Master’s Degree is conferred, in which ceremony darkness is a symbol of death. John Milton’s words, “What in me is dark, illumine; what is low, raise and support,” might well be the prayer of every candidate whose physical darkness symbolizes his spiritual ignorance. Plato said that “the ignorant suffered from ignorance, as the blind man from want of sight.”

An old Masonic catechism of the eighteenth century reads:

Q. Why was you hoodwink’d?

A. That my heart might conceal or conceive, before my eyes did discover.

Q. The second reason, Brother?

A. As I was in darkness at that time, I should keep all the world in darkness.

Almost universally, all over, the world, lodges meet at night. In some large cities, daylight lodges have been established by those whose occupations prevent their assemblage at night.

The temporary blindness of the hoodwink is symbolic of the deprivation of moral and intellectual light. The Masonic candidate, therefore, represents one immersed in intellectual darkness, groping in the search for that Divine light and truth that are the objects of a Freemasons labor.

A really blind man cannot be initiated into Freemasonry under the operation of the old regulation, which requires physical perfection in a candidate. This rule has nevertheless been occasionally modified. During the war a grand master gave a dispensation allowing a blind man to receive the degrees. Mackey states of blind Masons:

Chaplain Couden of the House of Representatives of the United States was blind, and yet was a Mason. W. W. Drake, Kileen, Texas, became blind during his mastership; he was re-elected for a second term. Charles F. Forshaw, Doncaster, England, who died in 1800, was for a number of years widely known as a Masonic musician. In his *Notes on the Ceremony of Installation*, Henry Sadler gives a sketch of the most famous of blind Masons, George Aarons,

master of Joppa Lodge No. 1827 and of Lodge of Israel. He was a ritualist taught by Peter Gilkes, and for nearly twenty years was lecture master in the leading lodges of instruction. Lux e Tenebris [Light from Darkness] Lodge, London, is a lodge for blind Masons. The Craft in England has always acted on the principle that when the Craft was transformed from operative to speculative the physical qualifications were transformed with it.

In the second section of the Fellowcraft Degree, during the consideration of the Winding Stairs, much is made of the five senses of human nature. We owe the elaboration of this, and the language, to William Preston's *Illustrations of Masonry* which is father to much exoteric ritual in the United States.

On *sight*, he wrote:

**Seeing** is that sense by which we distinguish objects, and are enabled in an instant of time, without change of place or situation, to view armies in battle array, figures of the most stately structure, and all the agreeable variety displayed in the landscape of Nature. By this sense we find our way in the pathless ocean, traverse the globe of earth, determine its figures and dimensions, and delineate any region or quarter of it. By it we measure the planetary orbs, and make new discoveries in the sphere of the fixed stars. Nay, more; by it we perceive the tempers and dispositions, the passions and affections, of our fellow-creatures, when they wish most to conceal them, so that though the tongue may be taught to lie and dissemble, countenance will display the hypocrisy to the discerning eye. In fine, the rays of light, which administer to this sense, are the most astonishing parts of the inanimate creation, and render the eye a peculiar object of admiration.

Of all the faculties, sight is the noblest. The structure of the eye and its appurtenances, evidence the admirable contrivance of Nature for performing all its various external and internal motions; while the variety displayed in the eyes of different animals, suited to their several ways of life, clearly demonstrate this organ to be the masterpiece of Nature's work.

Besides the symbolism of the hoodwink, there are two excellent psychological reasons for depriving the candidate temporarily of sight. A man has only a certain amount of power to receive impressions; if this power be divided between eye and ear and feeling, it is less strong for many, than if some senses are temporarily in abeyance. The blindfold emphasizes the words heard; there is more attention possible to important ritual when all, not a part, of attention is given to the use of one sense.

A candidate is more impressed when he is a part of the action of a degree. The more he becomes of it, the greater the impression. Hoodwinking the candidate singles him out from his fellows. He is, for the time, in a different situation from his conductors, his brethren-to-be. He is immediately made dependent. He can no longer defend himself. He must rely upon a friend. He is made "different" and because he is "different" he becomes, for the time, in his own thoughts "more important."

A curious and interesting by-path in the search for Masonic knowledge is found in the interweaving of symbols and symbolism. Thus, the perfect ashlar is made by a process of taking away, not adding to. The gavel and chisel remove roughness to leave smoothness; remove angles to leave square and level planes.

On removal, the hoodwink does not *create* the eyesight that then comes into play. The lodge, the lights, the altar, the brethren — they are not *made* by removal of a hoodwink; they are but revealed. The perfect ashlar from the rough, the sight to the hoodwinked, are thus *revelations*, not *creations*. These thoughts are in themselves symbols for the thoughtful; that Masonic light is not created anew for each initiate. It is always with the Fraternity, waiting but the opportunity, just as the perfect ashlar is always within all stones, awaiting the chisel of the master, as sight and knowledge are within the lodge and its ceremonies, awaiting only the removal of the hoodwink.

Of this, H. L. Haywood beautifully says:

It is ever thus with revelation. Gravitation existed before the first man came to be, but it was not until Sir Isaac Newton came that men saw this thing that had been about them always: he lifted the blind, and men saw gravitation. The sidereal universe is from eternity, but nobody *saw* it until Copernicus, after gazing at the stars from his narrow cell for many years, uncovered the majesty and meaning of the heavens. Steam had always been at work along with fire and water, like an unknown genie, but it took James Watt to discover (discover means to uncover, and is very similar to reveal) its presence. And so it ever was. Realities more wonderful than gravity, steam, or stars are perhaps playing about or within us all the while, but we, wearing the hoodwink of ignorance, are blind to the great presences. The prophet, the leader, the mighty teacher of the race is one who, born into blindness as are we all, somehow has been able to get the hoodwink from his eyes and is then able to cause us to see. He does not create; he confers the power of vision.

There is, then, power for good in darkness, and a blessing in temporary withdrawal of sight.

Let none who have worn the hoodwink ever forget that for all mankind *it is only after darkness falls that man can see the stars!*

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### Question Box

*This column will attempt to answer questions about Freemasonry.*

#### **Why do brethren entering and leaving a lodge salute the master?**

Masons entering or leaving a lodge salute the master at the altar if the lodge is at labor — they salute the junior warden if the lodge is at refreshment. This practice assures the master that

the brother knows on what degree the lodge is open. A brother making a wrong sign can be instructed immediately. It informs the master that the brother is a Mason of the degree on which the lodge is open; if he makes an inferior sign, and cannot, on request, give the right one, the master can then use other means to ascertain that no Entered Apprentice or Fellowcraft is present in a Master Mason lodge. The salute is a silent assurance to the master and through him to the brethren: "I remember my obligations."

Brethren salute on retiring to get permission to leave. No one can enter or leave a lodge room while a lodge is at labor without permission. If the master does not wish the brother who salutes to retire he tells him so, instead of responding to the salute.

At refreshment the lodge is in charge of the junior warden and the same salutes are given him as are usually given the master, and for the same reasons. In some grand jurisdictions, on busy evenings, as during a visitation or other Masonic function, the master will instruct the tiler to ask the brethren to salute the West, instead of the East, in order to not have his own labors in the East interrupted.

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