

Shaping the Ashlar
on
FREE MASONRY
in
CZECHOSLOVAKIA

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September, 1941

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0422-0021-001

FREE MASONRY IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

We are living at a time when History is in the making. With unprecedented swiftness events are taking place, the situation is changing from day to day. In these pulsative times the life of an individual or of a family does not mean anything; but even more - today the very life of a nation is at stake, after having been sacrificed at the decisive moment of crisis "to bring and ensure peace to other nations". Shining peace, "eternal peace", as we were told just three years ago, guaranteed by the signature of two leading statesmen; statesmen who, alone, thought they were predestined to mark the path of History to come.

At that time, three years ago, the Czechoslovak Republic, in the youthful age of only one score of years of independence, which age is equal to one year of human life, passed into temporary oblivion.

There, only there started "The Untergang des Abendlandes", foreseen and feared by our statesmen, the decline of the democratic world, the most dangerous crisis in the history of mankind, from which only now we are emerging.

One score of years. It was a young country, I was told by my audience, who questioned me after my lectures. Well, at that time we were writing the year of Our Lord 1938, and in the year of Our Lord 929 (remember, 1000 and 9 years ago), the same kind of occupation engulfed my country. So, you see, dear brethren, after all, we are a pretty old country, with many, generally inconvenient, experiences with our neighbors, with several hundred years of struggle against a far stronger aggressor and invader. And, we are still here...

I believe that if you were able to come to my country in the year of Our Lord 2941, one thousand years from now, you would find there a peaceful Czech people, living and toiling on their soil, as a useful member of the family of nations.

In that distant future, all of our present problems will have been solved; remember the long religious wars, fought throughout the middle ages, when so much innocent blood was shed, mostly in vain; and today, these wars are almost forgotten.

The peoples, in that distant future, will understand each other, will have common aims, will live according to the ideals of Abraham Lincoln, and - as I firmly believe - will live in p e a c e .

This aim of Mankind, which seems to be so simple (as all great truths are simple) touches the kernel of my Work in your Temple, the basic idea of Free Masonry, as it was understood in my country:

"The collaboration of all links of our chain of hands" -

not only at home, but also abroad, with all our brethren, wherever they live. And, as the chain of Free Masons embraces the whole World, where there is Light, and has today a considerable and growing influence on the shaping of events toward the formation of a new, democratic World,

I would like to stress one important phenomenon (which I will touch later in this Work), viz. "that this chain is, and can be in the future, only as strong as its weakest link".

This applies to all of us if we want to bring the World, as an entity, to a new, higher level of living, where mothers will no longer fear that they are raising their children for future sacrifice to the Moloch of War.

The basic idea of Free Masonry, i.e. the ideals of pure humanity applied to the activities of our daily life, are parallel with the democratic philosophy of life. The only difference is that a Free Mason, because of his Masonic belief and learning, has a far greater responsibility than a democratic citizen; he has the solemn duty of living in full accord with these laws.

You know well the standpoint of the rulers of Germany toward the democratic belief and form of life. They are fighting Democracy to conquer the World. And, as they too are well conscious of the parallel between Democracy and Masonry, they doubly hate Free Masonry, seeing in it the more dangerous foe.

By taking these basic facts into consideration, we can comprehend the background of the absolute urgency of the present rulers of Germany to extinguish, totally and for ever, Free Masonry and its remotest influence on the German people. We realize this when we conceive fully our Masonic aims and ideals, which are so contrary to the new super-religion of Nazism.

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The fundamentals of our aims and ideals are rooted in an age, when the desire for freedom of a small group of enlightened people, ever growing, until it embraced entire nations in a revolutionary mood, began to assail the absolutism of the State and the Church; in an age when the desire for common education was born; when gradually the peoples became conscious of the absolute necessity of establishing free relations among individuals; when the barriers between nations began to break down; when all differences of nationality, race and religion were submitting to settlement; and when the trend to accept the great idea that all men were born equal and free was rising.

These ideals, which are the essence of the foundations laid down as Temples of Free Masonry, prevailed also in our country. This was in the first half of the eighteenth century, at a time when the western section of Czechoslovakia, then the Kingdom of Bohemia, was under the scepter of the Hapsburg Monarchy.

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According to undocumented reports, the first Lodge is said to have been founded in Prague in the year 1726. The authentic proceedings show that the first work of a Masonic Lodge was held in Prague in 1740; it was the Lodge "by Three Crowned Stars".

Simultaneously, some officers of the Austrian army, stationed in Bohemia, founded a flying Lodge, which changed seat with them from

one post to another, as their garrisons moved. From these lodges sprang many more in Bohemia and Moravia during the later part of the eighteenth century.

As early as 1782, a provincial Grand Lodge of the Czech lands, by which was meant Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, was founded.

The members of this Grand Lodge contributed in no small measure to the issuance of the Patent of Tolerance, by Emperor Joseph Second, which introduced religious peace into these lands, exposed for more than 160 years to heavy religious oppression. They also took part in helping to lessen the compulsory feudal farm work and to spread social reforms, which, at that time, were not regarded as a task for the government. The documents, showing their part in lightening the lot of the poor people, living like robots, form a human monument for Free Masonry.

Into this era falls the awakening of the Czech nation.

The nation, deprived at that time for almost 200 years of its rights, both political and national, was asleep for a long time, but started a new life when the French and American revolutions brought new breaths of freedom into European countries. The Czech Masons naturally joined this movement. They did so, in the first place, for reasons of universal enlightenment, fostering progress by founding new libraries and assisting the building of schools and humanitarian institutions.

But the provincial Grand Lodge had a short duration; as early as 1793, the Emperor Franz the First prohibited by a special decree all secret societies in the German Empire; as this decree did not affect the Crown Lands of Bohemia (these lands were never legally part of the German Empire), the Masons could have continued their work; but due to the general situation they voluntarily went asleep in 1794.

Thus ended the first chapter of Masonic life in my country.

(ii)

The second chapter, which lasted 125 years, was a sad one. It was the era of Masonic Diaspory (dispersion).

As the Austrian authorities refused to permit Masonic lodges in the Czech lands during the whole nineteenth century, the Czech Free Masons established only humanitarian circles. New brethren were initiated abroad, i. e. in German, Hungarian and even Italian lodges, on the other side of the frontier.

These circles had a good membership and consisted of men who wrote the pages of Resuscitation of our nation.

One of these circles, with several hundred members, had connections with the United States and its Masonry. It was founded by Vojta Naprstek, a well-known humanitarian, who, during his stay in the United States, around 1850, became there a Free Mason; this circle, called "U Halanku", after the house, belonging to Mr. Naprstek, where its members regularly met, was for years in very active correspondence with its American brethren, mostly of Czech

origin; the closest relations were kept with Lodge "Palacky" in Chicago, Illinois, founded by a Czech brother.

During the time of their Diaspory, the Czech brethren had to travel for ritual work, receptions and promotion into foreign countries, where they were graciously accepted. Many attempts were made to get permission from the Austrian authorities to form a lodge, but all in vain.

Even in Diaspory, the Masonic ideals had a good influence on the development of Czech spiritual life. Czech literature, reborn at the beginning of the nineteenth century, used Masonic thoughts, ideals and rituals not only for their philosophical or historical, but also for belletristic works. Also Anti-Masonic literature appeared. Great excitement was created during the fierce struggles for freedom of thought and scientific research, when Thomas G. Masaryk, then Professor at Charles University in Prague, was attacked for his supposedly Masonic tendencies. T.G.Masaryk was never a Mason, but he lived by the ideals of Free Masonry. It is interesting to note, that those outstanding Czech men, whom the Czechoslovak Masons of today consider their spiritual leaders — Komenský, Březina, Masaryk — were never Free Masons.

(iii)

Two days before the proclamation of the Independence of the Czechoslovak people, who became, after three hundred years of oppression, free again, on October 26th, 1918, eleven Czech members of the border Lodge "Hiram" in Bratislava (then Pozsony in Hungary), met in Prague and agreed to start preparations for the founding of a Czech lodge.

On May 12th, 1919, they founded the firstxLodge, which they named in honor of Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius), and whose jewel you see on my ribbon. The light was brought into this Lodge No.1 of the Czechoslovak Republic by the Grand Orient of France, according to the York rite.

Simultaneously, not knowing anything about this decision, the officers of the Italian Military Mission, which was sent after the Armistice to Prague, founded the Czech Masonic Lodge "Národ" (Nation). This Lodge worked under the jurisdiction of the Grand Italian Lodge, following the Scotch ritual.

Around these two lodges, in the process of time, others were created. In the meantime, both original groups learned of one another. They tried to unite the then existing and dispersed Czechoslovak Masonry, with the intention of joining, as a National unit, the other nations of the World-wide Masonic movement.

This desire was realized in 1922, when the Grand National Lodge of Czechoslovakia was founded; the Scotch rite was decided upon and in 1923 the eternal Light was brought in by the Grand Lodge of Yugoslavia.

Under the jurisdiction of the newly born Grand Lodge, 26 lodges, with a membership, in 1938, of about 1.400 brethren, were created.

The individual lodges were relatively small, the usual membership being between 40 and 50 brethren; only two lodges had more than 100 members.

Even the mother Lodge, "Jan Amos Komenský", when it achieved a membership of more than 100 brethren, divided and a new lodge was founded; in this way, the Lodge No. 1 is the real mother of all other lodges.

New brethren were carefully and strictly selected and admitted only after a long wandering in the dark. The slowness of the growth of their number is best shown by the following fact: in 1937, I received an international Masonic passport; after 14 years of its existence, the Czechoslovak Grand Lodge issued a passport bearing the low number of only 888.

The Work in our lodges was carried out weekly, first in club rooms, later in temples. Generally, there were three conferences and at least one purely ritual work (as initiation, passing, raising, festive meeting or solemn gathering) in a month. The conference was usually held in the first degree, and each brother was obliged to present his work: one at least during his apprentice degree and one at least during his fellow craft degree; in the master mason degree the younger brethren presented usually one work in a year.

Of interest to you will be the form of closing of our Masonic day:

The Work in our Lodge is ended when the Great Light grows dark, i.e. when the Bible is closed, and when, after it, the evening is creeping into the nave of the Temple, thus ending the Day of the Mason's labor.

Then the Junior Warden, sitting in the south, and after him the Senior Warden, sitting in the West, extinguish the candles, lighting by their seats; the third candle, standing in the east, is extinguished by the W.M. himself; doing this he says:

Be thy glare died away,
Our inspiration glows further,
And the pulse of our fervent hearts
Shall kindle a New Light. *)

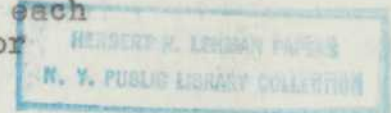
During this time, all lights in the Temple are slowly losing their intensity, so that after the last word of the W.M. there is almost dark. Then all brethren leave their seats, form a chain of their hands, and one of them, chosen for that day by the W.M., says the prologue.

To show you the form of these prologues, I am citing my last words to the chain, as said in my Lodge in spring 1938, before my departure to the United States:

" We are strong only as far as we are connected in
" a strong chain. Today, more than at any other time,
" this chain must hold a heavy weight of our responsi-
" bilities; responsibilities toward our State, toward
" Mankind.
" And how strong is this chain. Only as strong as its
" weakest link.

*) I translated this from my mother language; and when I did so, I discovered that the first letters of each line give the word, which is only to be lettered or halved.

"Boas be with you".



" Of this we have to be fully conscious; consequently,
 " it is our solemn duty to strenghten our weakest links,
 " all the same if these links are we, the brethren, or
 " our qualities or our deeds.
 " Let us strive, therefore, and each of us, to strenghten
 " this chain, so that all other brethren feel that they
 " can fully rely upon it, that not a single link would
 " slacken and that the whole chain shall hold even the
 " greatest strain. Then, only then we will be worthy
 " of a higher mission, entrusted us by the Royal Art. "

After the prologue, three times comes the shake of hands, going as a wave through the chain, and the W.M. concludes the ritual saying:

"We shall meet again, brethren, and peace and love will then be with all of us".

In Prague, where several lodges were working, it was a rule, that there should be, once a month, a joint meeting of two or more lodges. This did not pertain to solemn gatherings, when several lodges worked together.

Some of the lodges chose for their Masonic year a collective theme for the lectures (conferences); so, for instant, in 1937, four Prague lodges sponsored a cycle on "Defence of Democracy". Yes, this was, at that time, our only aim: to defend democracy; we saw the danger, we sounded the alarm, but we were not understood in the West

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In the beautiful land in the heart of Europe, consecrated by the toil of many generations, who had created a real garden of human endeavors, two nations lived for centuries. The Czechs and the Germans. Bound together by the common fate of a country, rich and fertile, they lived side by side while the wheel of European history kept turning, up and down.

The year 1918 brought a new freedom to the Czechs, to their old Kingdom of Bohemia, which included a German minority. I have already told you, how the third era in the life of our Free Masonry began. Our chief aim was to bring light into our Masonic life; our aim, second only to this, was to find a common platform for our mutual Masonic life (of both nationalities) in the newly reborn country. How we succeeded in this endeavor of our, History will show.

German Free Masons in Czechoslovakia were united in the "Grossloge Lessing zu den drei Ringen", a Grand Lodge, which received Light on October 23rd, 1920; the number of its brethren was almost the same as by Czech lodges. The history of their Masonic endeavors could be told by someone of their brethren, who are now, in a considerable number, here in the United States.

To understand the Masonic life in Czechoslovakia, we have to bear in mind following:

- (1) the humanitarian ideology, bequest of Comenius, of Czech brethren,
- (2) the Consitution of the Grand Lodge Lessing, following the same line of humanitarian ideals, and stating expressly, that

- each brother must devote all his energies to preserve the inner peace; and that all brethren regard themselves as true citizens of their State,
- (3) the democratic spirit of T.G.Masaryk, upon which the Republic was founded,
 - (4) the good-will on both sides.

The mutual relationship of the brotherhood of the Czech and German Grand Lodges was laid down in a special concordate. Higher in rank the two Grand Lodges, a supreme board of High Degrees was formed, governed by the Supreme Commander br. Mucha (who passed to the Great Beyond two years ago, not without having been molested by the Gestapo, in spite of his advanced age - he was almost 80 years old).

There were held many joint Works of both nationalities, either in a Czech or in a German lodge. I was initiated only in 1934, lived in Germany at that time, but I remember many of these joint Works.

The best example of this mutual collaboration, which I can cite today, was the Work "Free Masonry and the World Crisis", delivered in German Lodge "Harmonia", in February 1928, in German language, by br. Eduard Beneš, then Foreign Minister of the Czechoslovak Republic. You see, dear brethren, we understood each other, through our Masonic faith, even if our ideas were expressed in different languages.

Thus, our Free Masonry (both Czech and German) brought a convincing proof, that it is possible in Europe to solve the difficult problem of different nationalities, living on the same territory. To achieve such an aim, you need, above all, as I told you already, good-will. And I can tell you again that this good-will was prevalent in our country, and on b o t h sides.

There were lodges in our country, where, during a ritual, even three different languages were spoken; and all members understood one another regardless of which language was used, because they were members of the same chain - they were brethren. Brethren fully conscious of the fact, that they were - in this new, modern state - p i o n e e r s , showing the way to other nations; like the old trekkers, opening new, until that time unknown continent, which proved to become the Vanguard of World Democracy.

And this way of my brethren at home is leading to a higher plane of international understanding, where we shall, after this War, start with construction of a new, better life for those who will come after us.

Now, after hearing these words, I think you will understand why Free Masonry in Czechoslovakia was so dangerous to the Pan-German idea as forced by the Nazi system. It was against the expanding interests of the Nazi Reich that these two people, living for one thousand years side by side in the same land, should understand each other and find a common platform for their mutual intercourse.

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Although politics were excluded from the inner life of our lodges, we have to admit the Free Masonry was not without influence upon Czecho-

slovak political life. Such an influence cannot be denied; and we do not try to hide this fact. Masonic ideals have been professed by most of the outstanding political leaders and the brains of the Government.

As I have already told you, the selection of new members was very strict; only the best men of our cultural, artistic as well as economic and political life -- men who were ready to live in full accord with the laws of Free Masonry, and who could give a guarantee of their clear and unselfish intentions -- were accepted.

In this way, the best links were selected to form the chain.

I have already mentioned the fact that Thomas Garrigue Masaryk was not a Free Mason; but it was on the day of his burial, four years ago, that the National Grand Lodge of Czechoslovakia was summoned for a solemn mourning work at which this great democrat, the accepted leader of our nation, called "Our Father" by the people, was proclaimed by the G.M. as a Mason without apron.

At that time, the presidential chair of the Republic was held by the second in rank of our humanists, brother Eduard Beneš, son of the Lodge "Pravda vítězí"— TRUTH PREVAILS, the words which are carved into stone as the motto on our coat-of-arms.

And it was a fatal irony of coincidence, that the man who took over the reins of the Government immediately after Munich, the one-eyed General Syrový, during whose premiership the Masonic lodges went asleep, was a Free Mason too.

When, on March 15th, 1939, the German Army, by an act of wanton lawlessness, invaded my country and when the President of the so-called "Protectorate" formed a new Government, he appointed General Eliáš, a Free Mason, as Prime Minister, with six other Masons as members of the cabinet. Incidentally, two of them, br. Feierabend and br. Nečas, escaped, risking their lives and the lives of their wives and children, whom they had to leave behind, and joined the exiled Czechoslovak Government in London.

This Government conducts, as an allied force, the struggle for the reliberation of Czechoslovakia. This Government is unconditionally and unanimously accepted by our people at home. This Government is recognized by the Government of the United States, Great Britain and its dominions, Russia and China, great powers, fighting the plague of Nazism.

The President of this Government is our brother Eduard Beneš; in these eventful times, when the life of the nation is at stake, the fate of my country could not be confided to better hands; this link of our chain is predestined for a still greater task, with immense responsibilities: to build up a just and durable peace, for all and for ever.

Several members of this Government are our brethren too; one of them, well-known to you, is leading our foreign policy; it is br. Jan Garrigue Masaryk, the son of our President-Liberator, a member of my lodge "Jan Amos Komenský".

In these links, working abroad, our Free Masonry lives and through them a New Light will be brought into our Temples.

(iv)

Today, when I am privileged to present to you, my American Brethren, my Work, delivering it in your Temple, may I be permitted to remember my brethren at home.

Allow me to recall, first of all, those who are suffering in prisons and concentration camps and especially those who were taken from their work on the ashlar by the brutal force of German might.

They can only be honored by their brethren abroad
in their thoughts and in their hearts.

Free Masons in Czechoslovakia. You cannot realize how much pain and distress, both spiritual and physical, is embodied in these words. They are living in the dark, their Light extinguished, but they have never lost hope, their inner hope, that the Light will be brought to them again.

And their message to you is a simple one: "Tell them, over there, that we here stand as a citadel."

It is a real citadel, dear brethren, a citadel under siege, a spiritual stronghold never to surrender. In this citadel our brethren are living, true to their chain, while exposed to sufferings which only the new order could invent.

I will mention only one case, one of hundreds: my W.M., who initiated me seven years ago, disappeared; he returned home, several weeks later, and his family could not recognize him; this news I received from home only a few days ago.

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The Czechoslovak Masons, my dear brethren, performed, when their hour struck, a ritual work never mentioned in the Old Duties, because never foreseen:

the Work of the Destruction of their Temples.

They destroyed them. They burnt and annihilated most of our files, but the most precious relics and distinctions were removed and hidden in remote places, all over the country.

And so, in 1938, our Free Masonry entered the fourth and saddest chapter of its existence: it went asleep.

The same tragedy occurred in 1794, in the dark era of absolutism; but what a difference; today, those times of darkness seem to us only as a luminous arctic night in comparison to that terrible darkness of night, going through the years 1939, 1940, 1941 and — 1942.

But, even if the night is deep and the storm rages, our brethren overthere, in the country called always by the Government of the United States as Czechoslovakia, remained awake. Their ideals remained just as the Czech nation remained, strong in misfortune,

strong and united, strong morally, always resisting spiritually.

Look at this nation, the nation which had to go through the most terrible spiritual crisis, in 1938: to be alone, entirely alone; and then, a few months later, their German overlords told them: "You have your Jews, you have your Masons, go and beat them". Nothing like that happened. Why?

The answer is plain: it is contained in two names, impersonating the Czech spirit of humanity — Masaryk and Beneš; to these I have to add a third, that of Komenský; the name which was given to our Lodge No. 1 and whose initials I am proud to bear on my jewel.

The Bishop of Czech Brethren (known also here in the United States, as Moravian Brethren), Jan Amos Komenský, whom the World esteems as Comenius, who died in the year 1670, before the advent of Masonic lodges, free and accepted, is regarded by us as the teacher of our nation; but more than that: through his educational work in England, Sweden, Netherlands (where he died in exile), in Poland and Hungary, he is called the teacher of Nations. His ideals, embracing all humanity, influenced the constitutional books of the Masons, the Old Duties. His teachings permeated the Czech nation and his philosophy was accepted as the guiding spirit of Czechoslovak Free Masonry.

And Comenius is our hope too. With him, one of the mightiest spirits our nation has ever produced, we all firmly believe, that our return is certain, that our Work will be resumed and that the rough ashlar shall again be shaped in our country.

"After the tempest of wrath has passed, the rule
of thy country will return to thee, O Czech people"

this prophecy of Comenius became true 270 years after its utterance. And because today our freedom is one of the aims of the entire civilized world, it will be true soon again, as an undivisible part of the World Justice.

And so, knowing that in the History of Mankind, brutal forces have never succeeded for a long time, and believing, here, in this Free Democracy of yours, that there will be Light again in our Temples, I conclude my work with the words of our ritual, when our W.M. parted with us, closing our Masonic day:

"Sejdeme se zase, bratři,
a bude mír a láska
s námi všemi."

We shall meet again, brethren, and peace and love will then be with all of us.-

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