

# PLAYING INDIAN

## THE ESSENTIAL UNREALITY OF SECRET SOCIETIES

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While it is true that varying degrees of antiquity are claimed and deserved by secret societies, it is also true that secret societies are one of the major phenomena of our modern life. It is estimated that there are about eight hundred different societies in our country with a ritual and secret obligations which would justify us in classifying them as secret societies. Their combined membership easily includes half the total population of our United States. It is impossible to live a single week in the most remote village of our country without having forced upon our attention in some way or other this phenomenon of secret societies. Almost every night of the week is some lodge night. Stately lodge temples and shrines are taking their place in our cities and villages alongside our churches. A large part of the news of our newspapers centers around the various meetings of lodges. There are many of our people who think they cannot live a normal life as American citizens without belonging to one or more secret societies.

### The Lure of "Make-Believe"

Various attempts have been made to explain this situation. It has been attributed to our social

freedom, to the abundance of wealth, to shorter working hours and more leisure, to the instinct for companionship and to the desire for an easy religion. All of these undoubtedly exert some influence. But Charles Merz with true discrimination has placed his finger on another aspect of this lodge question which must be considered. In the third chapter of his book, "The Great American Band Wagon, a study of Exaggerations," he pictures with mild sarcasm the whole spectacle of lodge life as an example of grown men and women "playing Indian." That is one of the ways in which the pent-up energies of people living a hum-drum existence seek expression in an exaggerated and unreal way. Even the names of the lodges indicate their unreality. Men and women gather in "roosts" and "nests" and "dens" and call themselves Eagles and Owls and Bears and Moose. They attire themselves in all sorts of ridiculous regalia and call themselves Knights and Princes and Shieks and Cedars of Lebanon and what not. Many of the lodges are declared by their names to be "Mystic" orders of some kind or other, while others are "Imperial," or "Illustrious," or "Exalted." And Mr. Merz calls attention to the fact that the names of over fifty of the secret societies of our country include one or both of the words "Royal" and "Ancient," and adds that this is perhaps "understandable in a nation which has neither royalty nor antiquity, but a vicarious enthusiasm for both."

Although these lodges flourish in the world's greatest republic few, if any, of them are modelled after the pattern of the republic. They do not have a mere Presiding Officer. They have a Grand Ex-

alted Ruler or a Supreme Archon or an Imperial Potentate or a Sovereign Grand Commander. Their Secretary is the Illustrious Scribe, the one who presumably reads notices and makes announcements, the Supreme Stentatorus, their treasurer is the August Keeper of the Strong Box. And this is not true alone of the officials, for here is John Smith, an ordinary member who, on one evening each week is able to transform himself into a Sir Knight Errant of the Mystic Order of Granada with all the appurtenances thereof. Imagine if you can, every night of the week over this great country one to five million people bringing out their fezes and epaulettes and tomahawks and swords and robes and plumes and—"Presto Change!"—one to five million people are suddenly changed into Knights or priests or savages or Saracens or Galahads or whatever fancy may demand. Mr. Merz attributes the present popularity of the lodges to the possibility of living in a modern world and yet being ancient, with the most hoary headed antiquity; of living in a hum-drum world and yet being a knight or a prince or some other illustrious personage; of living in an age of unparalleled enlightenment and yet holding concealed from the eyes of men, secrets which have never been found out.

#### Unreality—Superficial or Essential?

In looking upon such proceedings in a casual way, they may appear innocent horse-play. If that was all it amounted to, it might be harmless. But when we look further into the constitution and methods of these lodges, we find that this element of unreality runs into the core and makes them

unworthy of friendly toleration and even dangerous to human welfare and contrary to the laws of God. It is of the essence of sin to make the unreal seem real. That is deception. That brought ruin upon our first parents. We live in a real world and must face life as it is. We must let the revealing light of Divine Truth shine fully upon life's way, if it is to be the way of greatest happiness and usefulness. It does no good to anaesthetize life with man-made schemes of deception and make-believe. Lodges represent an unreal attitude toward life, not only in the superficial matters of titles and ritual and exercises of childish make-believe, but also in their attitude toward social life, toward industry, toward politics, toward religion. The emphasis on the unreal in the lodges is clearly seen in their social exclusiveness, in their commercial favoritism, in their political anarchy and in their religious paganism.

#### Friends—At Sight of a Lodge Button?

Perhaps the most widely advertised feature of the lodge is its social life. The lodges boast of their spirit of brotherhood and opportunities for companionship. But these are largely forced for the members are pledged with solemn, if profane, oaths to cherish the friendship of the lodge brother and never fail to answer his signal of distress. Men who are restricted in their social contacts to a particular body of men soon become narrow in their sympathies and more or less snobbish in their treatment of others. Friendship is not an artificial thing to be determined by a lodge button. It is a gift from the Almighty, making all men

brotherly. It is to be consecrated and used for His glory. What will be the effect upon the social life of our nation with half our population handicapped by the unreal, lodge view, of friendship?

#### Is "Pull" a Safe Foundation in Industry?

Another widely advertised feature of the lodge is its commercial benefit to its members. But again these benefits rest on an unreal basis. Because a man is a member of a certain lodge, he is preferred and advanced in business over the heads of others who outrank him in seniority and efficiency. The lodge encourages its members to depend upon favors rather than merit in their business life. But merit will always remain the real basis for success in business. As long as the lodges stand for commercial favoritism, they may be rightly charged with the promotion of unreal standards in industry.

#### Lodge Loyalty and Patriotism

Another aspect of the essential unreality of the lodge's attitude is to be found in the sphere of political life. The lodges require of their members a loyalty superior even to rightful political loyalty. The penal sanctions of the lodge are more terrifying than those of the state. "The highest penalty of the state, even in cases of treason and murder, is death, but the lodge law adds torture and dismemberment." The fact that it is often said by lodge men that these penalties are never enforced has no bearing. How do we know that they are never enforced when those same members who say they are not, have sworn with terrible oaths to

conceal and never reveal the transactions of their lodges? Many lodge men consider the obligations of their lodge as superior to their duties as citizens. As Dr. Blanchard says, "When this is the case, you have an incipient treason." Fifteen years ago, a prominent judge in Iowa is said to have declared that a large part of the testimony given in our courts was perjury. This is evident now even to those not officially connected with our courts, and undoubtedly lodge oaths are responsible for much of this perjury. "A man with two oaths on his conscience cannot keep both." Thus the course of justice may be blocked and the very life of our nation endangered. That this is not all theory is shown by such well known incidents as the Morgan case in New York. A man was murdered by the Masons for publishing their secrets, but efforts made to bring the murderers to trial failed utterly. Even when the State of New York appointed special counsel to help and men of national reputation, such as W. H. Seward and Daniel Webster, offered their services, it was all without avail because men in all walks of life, ministers of religion, civil officials and others united in protecting these criminals from the punishment their crime deserved. They placed the obligation of their lodge first and thereby became traitors to their country. Because of this fact, Daniel Webster declared, "Under the influence of this conviction, it is my opinion that the future administration of all such oaths (i. e., of secret societies), and the formation of all such obligations should be prohibited by law." Secret societies represent an unreal attitude toward political life as it is taught in God's Word and as it is accepted by law-abiding and liberty-loving people everywhere.

### The Delusion of a False Religion

But there is another count in the charge that secret societies are built on unreality and that is in regard to their religious claims. There can be only one true God; only one true religion; only one true philosophy of life. The true God is the only real God. The Christian religion is the only religion that is based on realities. The Holy Scriptures show that the Lord God, who reveals himself to men through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the only living and true God. Therefore, the only true and real religion is that which is based on the full acceptance of this revelation of God in Christ. All others must necessarily be false.

There can be little question about the claims of secret societies to exert a religious influence. Most of them admit this, but even if they do not, their altars and creeds and rituals and burial services show their manifest intention. Their religion is a broad deistic religion which, though requiring faith in a Supreme Being, does not accept the Bible in its entirety as the Word of God nor Jesus Christ as the Son of God. The name of Jesus and all reference to Him is in general studiously avoided in the creeds and prayers and rituals. The way of salvation taught or implied is by good works. Nothing is said of sin and repentance and faith in a divine Saviour. Good and bad men are presumably sent to heaven without any discrimination. The principles of morality taught by Christ are ignored. Lodge members are bound by oath to do good to and refrain from injuring lodge brothers, without regard to the divine injunction to "do good unto all men." So that the entire practice of religion by

the lodge amounts to an impious and blasphemous use, oftentimes by ungodly and unregenerate men, of sacred names and privileges and institutions. One of the greatest foes of Christianity in this and other civilized lands is the pagan religion of the secret societies, which deludes men by offering them an easy, popular, profitable and righteous manner of living on earth and a sure through-ticket to heaven at death. The most active lodge members are generally not church members at all, or if so, very indifferent ones. Where the lodges flourish, true Christianity languishes. To all those who accept Christianity as the truth, the ultimate reality in the sphere of religion, this is cause for great concern.

### Therefore—What?

While to unthinking people the ridiculous horse-play of the modern lodge with all its high-sounding titles and impressive regalia may seem to be nothing but the harmless amusement of overwrought men and women, to one who considers the matter in all its aspects, this apparent superficiality and unreality is seen to pervade to the heart of the whole movement and vitally affect its philosophy of life, socially and industrially and politically and religiously. Therefore it must be opposed because IT is essentially opposed to the truth. There is no place for secret societies in an ideal world. There can never be any secret societies in the Kingdom of God. Therefore the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America lifts its testimony against all secret, oath-bound societies as being contrary to the principles of God's Word and detrimental to the highest interests of human welfare.

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