

THE ORDER OF EASTERN STAR

(The article in the July issue on WOMEN MASONS OF RECORD inevitably led our attention to the ORDER OF THE EASTERN STAR. In the early 1950's several chapters of this Order were organized in the country following the successful efforts of prominent Masonic Brethren, among whom were MWB Michael Goldenberg and MWB Antonio Gonzalez Sr., to obtain a charter for "Rosario Villaruel Chapter." For the first time Filipinos were admitted into the Order and the Chapter became the second in the Philippines, there being in existence here already for many decades the "Mayon Chapter No. 1." We feel that the event is one of the most significant developments in Philippine Masonry in recent years, the other two being the establishment of a Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite and the introduction of York Rite in this jurisdiction. We consider these events significant because the fresh interest they evoked in Masonry had a decidedly strengthening effect upon the local Fraternity.)

We are indebted to MWBro. Antonio Gonzalez, Sr., P.G.M., for the history of the Eastern Star taken from Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry. Due to limitations of space, the article had to be abridged by us considerably but without sacrifice of essential facts of the history. — Editor.)

Degrees for women under the title of the "Masonry of Adoption," were as long ago as 1765 in vogue on the continent of Europe. These were

administered under the patronage of the ruling Masonic body and especially flourished in the palmy days of the Empire in France, the Empress Josephine being at the head of the Order and many women of the highest standing were active members.

The Term "Adoption," so it is said, was given to the organization because the Freemasons formally adopted the ladies to whom the mysteries of the several degrees were imparted.

Albert Pike, who took great interest in this "Masonry of Adoption" and made a translation of the ritual into English with some elaboration dictated by his profound knowledge of symbolism and philosophy, says in the preface to his ritual of the Masonry of Adoption, "Our mothers, sisters, wives and daughters cannot, it is true, be admitted to share with us the grand mysteries of Freemasonry, but there is no reason why there should not be also a Masonry for them, which may not merely enable them to make themselves known to Masons, and so obtain assistance and protection; but by means of which acting in concert through the tie of association and mutual obligation, they may cooperate in the great labors of Masonry by assisting in and, in some respects, directing their charities, and toiling in the cause of human progress. The object of 'la Maçonnerie des Dames' is, therefore, very inadequately expressed, when it is said to be for the improvement and purification of the sentiments."

The Order of the Eastern Star has become just such an organization, strong enough to take an active and powerful cooperative concern in the beneficent labors of Masons for the care of the indigent and afflicted. While entirely different and distinct from the Masonry of Adoption, being indeed of American and not French development, all the expectations so ably expressed by Brother Pike have in no other fraternal association been so admirably fulfilled as in the Order of the Eastern Star.

Some mysteries involve the origin of the Order. In this respect the Order of the Eastern Star is closely akin to the various branches of the Masonic brotherhood. To unravel the truth from the entanglement of myth is, with many of these knotty problems, a troublesome and perhaps a never wholly satisfactory task.

First of all let us take the testimony of Brother Rob Morris, than whom no one person has, it is conceded, given more freely of his service in the early development of the Order.

During the latter part of 1884 Brother Rob Morris gave an account of the origination of the Eastern Star, which is in part as follows:

"In the winter of 1850 I was a resident of Jackson, Mississippi. For some time previous I had contemplated, as hinted above, the preparation of a Ritual of Adoptive Masonry, the degrees then in vogue appearing to me poorly conceived, weakly wrought out, unimpressive and particularly defective in point of motive.

"About the first of February, 1850, I was laid up for two weeks with a sharp attack of rheumatism, and it

was this period which I gave to the work in hand.

"From the Holy Writings I culled four biographical sketches to correspond with my first four points, viz., Jephthah's Daughter (named 'Adah' for want of a better), Ruth, Esther, and Martha. These were illustrations of four great congeries of womanly virtues, and their selection has proved highly popular. The fifth point introduced me to the early history of the Christian Church, where, amidst a noble army of martyrs, I found many whose lives and death overflowed the cup of martyrdom with a glory not surpassed by any of those named in Holy Writ. This gave me Electa, the "Elect Lady", friend of St. John, the Christian woman whose venerable years were crowned with the utmost splendor of the crucifixion.

"The theory of the whole subject is succinctly stated in my 'Rosary of the Eastern Star,' published in 1865: To take from the ancient writings five prominent female characters, illustrating as many Masonic virtues, and to adopt them into the fold of Masonry. It is a fitting comment upon these statements that in all the changes that the Eastern Star has experienced at so many for thirty-four years, no change in the names, histories or essential lessons has been proposed.

"So my ritual was complete, and after touching and retouching the manuscript, as professional authors love to do, I invited a neighboring Mason and his wife to join with my own, and to them, in my own parlor, communicated the Degrees. They were the first recipients — the first

of twice fifty thousand who have seen the signs, heard the words, exchanged the touch, and joined in the music of the Eastern Star. When I take a retrospect of that evening — but thirty-four years ago — and consider the abounding four hundred Eastern Star Chapters at work to-day, my heart swells with gratitude to God, who guided my hand during that period of convalescence to prepare a work, of all the work of my life the most successful.

“Not that my work met no opposition. Quite the reverse. It was not long until editors, reporters, writers, newspaper critics and my own private correspondents, began to see, the evil of it. Letters were written me, some signed, some anonymous warning me that I was periling my own Masonic connections in the advocacy of this scheme. In New York City the opponents of the Eastern Star even started a rival project to break it down. They employed a literary person, a poet of eminence, a gentleman of social merit, to prepare rituals under an ingenious form, and much time and money were spent in the effort to popularize it, but it survived only a short year and is already forgotten.

“But the Eastern Star glittered steadily in the ascendant. In 1855 I arranged the system of ‘Constellations of the Eastern Star,’ and established more than one hundred of these bodies. I have wondered that the system did not succeed. It must be because the times were not ripe for it. The opposition to ‘Ladies Masonry’ was too bitter. The advocates of the plan were not sufficiently influential. At any rate it fell through.

“Four years later I prepared an easier plan, styled ‘Families of the Eastern Star,’ intended in its simplicity and the readiness by which it could be worked, to avoid the complexity of the Constellations. This ran well enough until the war broke out, when all Masonic systems fell together with a crash.

“This ended my work in systematizing the Eastern Star, and I should never have done more with it, save confer it in an informal manner as at first, but for Brother Robert McCoy of New York, who in 1868, when I had publicly announced my intentions of confining my labors during the remainder of my life to Holy Land investigations, proposed the plan of Eastern Star Chapters now in vogue. He had my full consent and endorsement, and thus became the instigator of a third and more successful system.”

In another statement under date of 1884, Brother Morris further informs us: “Some writers have fallen into the error of placing the introduction of the Eastern Star as far back as 1775, and this they gather from my work, ‘Lights and Shadows of Freemasonry,’ published in 1852. What I intended to say in that book was that the French officers introduced Adopted Masonry into the Colonies in 1775, but nothing like the degree called the Eastern Star, which is strictly my own origination.”

The statement of Brother Morris was deserving of the utmost consideration and confidence. His devotion to Masonic service was long and honorable, freely acknowledged by his brethren with promotions to places of the highest prominence within their gifts. We can thus ap-

proach his assertions confident of their accuracy so far as the intent of Brother Morris is concerned.

Candor, nevertheless, compels the conclusions that our excellent brother did not in his various and valuable contributions to the history of the Eastern Star, and the related bodies, always clearly define his positions, and the studious reader is therefore somewhat in doubt whether on all occasions the meaning is unmistakable. For example, the foregoing references are in themselves very clear that Brother Morris was the originator of the Eastern Star. It is substantially shown in detail how the several items of consequence were actually put into practice by him.

Brother Willis D. Engle, the first R.W. Grand Secretary of the General Chapter of the Order, says on page 12 of his History that "The fact is that Brother Morris received the Eastern Star degree at the hands of Giles M. Hillyer, of Vicksburg, Mississippi, about 1849."

Puzzling as is the mixture of statements, there is the one possible explanation that in speaking of the Order, Brother Morris had two quite different things in mind and that he may have inadvertently caused some to understand him to be speaking of the one when he referred to the other, or to both, as the case might be. We know that he had received Adoptive degrees and we are well aware that he had prepared more than one arrangement of Eastern Star degrees or of allied ceremonies. It is more likely that in speaking of the one his thoughts should dwell upon the other; the one, Adoptive Masonry, being as we might say the subject in general; the other, the

Eastern Star, being the particular topic. He could very properly think of the degrees as an old idea, the Masonry of Adoption, and he could also consider it as being of novelty in the form of the Eastern Star; in the one case thinking of it as given him, and in the second instance thinking of it as it left his hands. In any event, the well-known sincerity and high repute of Brother Morris absolve him from any stigma of wilful misrepresentation.

Certainly it is due his memory that the various conflicting assertions be given a sympathetic study and as friendly and harmonious a construction as is made at all possible by their terms.



THE CURSE OF IDLENESS

The bees carried to Barbados and the Western Island ceased to lay up honey after the first year. They found the weather so fine and the materials for honey so abundant that they became exceedingly profligate, ate up their capital, worked no more, but amused themselves by flying about the sugar-houses and stinging the negroes.

In these days we have some people like those bees. Because they are not compelled to work, they are not only idle but vicious.

— Selected.