

Therefore, it matters not whether the out-going Master surrenders the emblem of authority to the in-coming Master or whether he places it into the hands of a brother who has already passed the chair for the latter, in his turn, to conduct the ceremony and eventually to pass on the gavel to the in-coming Master, in every instance the symbol of power is passed on in an unbroken sequence and the spirit of the tradition is worthily upheld.

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SHAKESPEARE — A FREEMASON?

By L. W. Bridgman

Some Deductions by Inquisitive Students
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Reprinted in the Masonic press some years ago were views that the poet Shakespeare may have been a Mason. In printing certain lines from immortal plays, the "Royal Arch Mason" suggested that either Shakespeare's vocabulary was Masonic or "did the Freemasons get their vocabulary from Shakespeare?"

Here are some provocative quotations:

In Act III, Scene 2, of Henry VIII, the Dukes of Suffolk and Norfolk have been talking with Cardinal Wolsey, informing the Cardinal of the King's intentions to forfeit the Cardinal's possessions. Leaving Wolsey alone, he thus soliloquizes:

So, farewell to the little good you bear me.
Farewell! A long farewell, to all my greatness!
This is the state of man; today he puts forth
The tender leaves of hope; tomorrow blossoms,
And bears his blushing honours thick upon him;
The third day comes a frost, a killing frost;
And, when he thinks, good easy man, full surely,
His greatness a-ripening, nips his root,
And then he falls, as I do.

(Line 350-358.)

Act III, Scene 1, Twelfth Night:
And that no woman has, nor ever none
Shall mistress be of it.

Act II, Scene 4, Titus Andronicus:
Both are at the LODGE.

Act V, Scene 1, Taming of the Shrew:
What! My old Worshipful Master!

Act IV, Scene 5, Merry Wives of Windsor:
Now, . . . Whence come you?

Act III, Scene 1, Measure for Measure:
Lambkins to signify that the Craft being richer than innocency.

Additional "evidence" is offered in a provocative article by Newcomb Condee, one of a series published in the Los Angeles Scottish Rite Bulletin. Much of his information was gained from a book, "Shakespeare, Creator of Freemasonry," by Bro. Alfred Dodd, and other writers, including Clegg and Mackey. Condee's own view was that, even if not of the Craft, the Bard knew its language and ritualistic expressions. (Abraham Lincoln, although not a Mason, also has been regarded by some as having been somewhat familiar with Masonic writ.)

Condee enumerated from Shakespeare's plays many expressions and allusions with familiar connotations, not included in the list printed above.

Examples:

"And when they talk—whisper one another in the ear, and he that speaks doth gripe the hearer's wrist." King John IV, 2.

"Come, swear to that, kiss the book." Tempest II, 1.

"The singing Masons building roofs of old." Henry II, 1, 4.

"I am a Brother of a Gracious Order." Measure for Measure, III, 2.

"Where is thy leather apron and thy rule?" Julius Caesar 1, 1.

"Now, by St. John, that news is bad indeed." Richard III, 1, 2.

"Guard the door without. Let him not pass. Kill him rather." Othello, V, 2.

"Now go and if thy tongue can speak who 'twas that cut your tongue." Titus Andronicus II, 4.

"You have made good work, you and your apron." Coriolanus IV, 6.

"Being then appointed Master of this design." Tempest I, 2.

"Who builds stronger than the Mason." Hamlet V, 2.

"You shall see him in the triple pillar of the world." Anthony and Cleopatra I, 1.

"I will find where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed within the center." Hamlet II, 2.

"Well said, that was laid on with a trowel." As You like It I, 2.

Condee also saw likeness of Shakespeare's ideas of the Greek philosopher Pythagoras of the Ancient Craft: "To hold opinion with Pythagoras," Merchant of Venice IV, 11, and "What is the opinion of Pythagoras concerning wild fowl? Twelfth Night IV, 2. He also saw significance in the Bard's familiarity with theories associated with numbers, as: "They say there is a divinity in odd numbers, either in nativity, chance, or death." Merry Wives of Windsor V, 1.

"Aside from these many ritualistic expressions and allusions, Condee concluded, "many Masonic students suggest there is a great deal of Craft doctrine displayed in the plays as a whole. Shakespeare was, of course, an artist. He placed life itself on his stage, and if the speeches of any particular character were considered alone, you could, to paraphrase a well known expression, 'prove anything by Shakespeare.'"

The author Dodd was quoted as follows:

"There can be no possible doubt that Shakespeare regarded himself as an Ethical Teacher. This fact at once explains his connection with Freemasonry. In the plays we have great epics of moral passions against the crying evils of the times. They are tremendous sermons of power couched in a very different form from pulpit utterance. They have been reached under varying conditions almost nightly for three hundred years. The text of King Lear is ingratitude; of Othello, jealousy; of Macbeth, unscrupulous ambition, etc.

"Each member of the Craft will have to answer these questions in his own way and according to his own understanding, but certainly Shakespeare, like the Bible, should be read not left on the shelf to gather dust."

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The life that is not guided by firm principles and a strong will is likely to be shipwrecked by the gusts of temptation, just as a carelessly handled sailboat may be capsized by a sudden puff of wind.

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