

A good and learned brother once surprised me at lodge by asserting that equality was an impossible concept because people could never be the same. The same was repeated to me by others as well - hat in order for there to be equality everyone would have to be exactly uniform and identical in every respect.

I observed too that our so-called "Charter of Rights" guarantees that everyone is to be equal under the law - except those who do not belong to a group which is supposed to be "disadvantaged". The law is entitled to heap disadvantages on everyone else presumably so the disadvantages will cancel out. This principle is supported by all politicians and by the news media - indeed I heard one politician declare that this kind of singling out for special treatment of particular races, religions, ethnic and other groups was being done in the name of "equality".

To me, it sounds like George Orwell's Animal Farm: "All animals are equal but some are more equal than others." This is of course nonsense but no less so than the Charter of Rights version of equality, and it is understandable that, on hearing such nonsense, people might despair of the idea of equality altogether.

Yet in Masonry, we are told, is to be found "the true import of the three great social treasures" and one of them is equality.

The Greeks had a myth of a brigand or highway-robber called Procrustes who, when he laid hands on an unwary traveler, compelled him to lie on a bed Procrustes had. If the traveler fit the bed exactly he was sent on his way but if he were too tall and his legs extended over the end of the bed Procrustes would fetch out his saw and saw off the ends of the traveler's legs so that he would fit. Likewise if the traveler were too short for the bed, Procrustes would take hammer and tongs and beat and stretch the unfortunate traveler until he was the right size.

Some would find in Procrustes a symbol for equality since he tended to make all travelers the same. Equal treatment in this sense means treatment that has the result of making everyone uniform. This is the concept of equality that we are all too familiar with.

Freemasonry's symbol of equality is the level, which implies, not treatment which makes everyone uniform but uniform treatment of everyone.

"The level demonstrates that we are descended from the same stock, are partakers of the same nature, and share in the same hope; and although distinctions among men are necessary to reward merit and ability, yet no eminence of station in life should make us forgetful that we are brothers, and that he who is placed on the lowest spoke of fortune's wheel is equally entitled to our regard."

Masonry denies neither the fact nor the inevitability of fortune favouring some more than others, but denies its significance ore importance. The society we admire is "the society of men who prize honour and virtue above the external advantages of rank and fortune." The ideal Freemason "honours virtue though it be in the most humble garment and does not favour vice though it be clothed in purple, and administers justice to merit whether dwelling in palaces or cottages." Note that a Mason does not deny the

same treatment to those whose good fortune places them in palaces nor does he try to tear such palaces down around them.

It is virtue that Masonry honours and everyone, no matter how rich or poor, educated or unlearned, strong or feeble, quick or slow of thought, honoured or obscure has an equal and identical capacity for virtue and merit among Masons. Therefore all are treated with respect and are granted honour.

The contribution of each brother to Masonry is accorded equal respect. Masonry acknowledges that no two men have the same talents or abilities, but that is not of significance. Masons are only charged to "exert those talents wherewith God has blest" them, and to pursue those contributions "that lie within the compass of [their] attainment."

Indeed whereas the false notion of equality represented by Procrustes' bed requires the perversion and mutilation of those that do not fit the mold, we Masons believe that true equality does not require us to penalize and hamper some of our fellow creatures because they are different from some others. Quite the contrary. No one expects to see and I certainly have never see a building where every stone is of the same shape and dimensions. No architect would design such a building--the different stones serve different purposes and their differences enhance the strength and beauty of the whole. So as parts of the figurative Temple of the G.A.O.T.U. we serve different purposes, have different talents, strengths and weaknesses, and are each required to accomplish what we can. Our knowledge that this is so enables us to realize that we indeed stand on the level and every brother is entitled to the same consideration no matter what his external circumstances. "The internal and not the external qualifications of a man are what Masonry regards."

This notion of equality is not only spoken of but is actually practised, as we all know, among the brethren of the Craft every day. If anyone should suggest that Masonry has nothing to offer the Modern world, ask them to consider this: in a world where the idea of equality has been perverted beyond recognition, Masonry holds out the truth and encourages, as it has always encouraged, the practice of true equality.