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*A
Short History
of the
Order of the
Eastern Star*

A SHORT HISTORY OF
THE ORDER OF THE EASTERN STAR

If a record of all the efforts to create and promulgate an organization were kept and carefully filed away for future reference, the writing of a history would be a simple matter; but when the origin of an organization is shrouded in deep mystery, and only a few fragments of writings or publications are available, the task is at best only fairly satisfactory.

The history of Masonry itself is mysterious, and the meager information that can be obtained is, to say the most, only rudimentary. The Order of the Eastern Star, founded on Masonry and for the benefit of the female relatives of Master Masons, even of so much more recent date, is also draped about with much secrecy, and its real origin is as much in doubt as is Masonry itself. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that all organizations—even government—are the result of an evolution. A thought, a word, an act and the process is started that finally results in a mighty organization, and to trace its history and to try to give the credit to the proper person often lets honor fall where it is not altogether deserved.

Our first reliable information on the subject of organizations based on Masonry and for the benefit of the female relatives of Master Masons seems to take us to what was called "Androgynous Ma-

sonry" and "Adoptive Masonry." The word "Androgynous" comes from two Greek words which mean "man and woman," and means an organization of Masonry consisting of both men and women. In the first part of the Eighteenth Century quite a number of such degrees, variously known as "Ladies' Masonry," "Holy Virgin," "Ladies' Friend," "Kindred Degree," "Ark and Dove," "Good Samaritan," "Heroines of Jericho," "Maids of Jerusalem," "Daughters of Zion," "Daughters of Bethlehem," "Ladies of the Cross," and perhaps others, all partaking in some degree of the work of the Eastern Star as it now is, were formed.

About the year 1730 there appeared in France an organization called "Adoptive Masonry." It derived this title because, according to its rule, it was necessary for each Lodge, as it was then called, to be under the direct sanction and warrant of a regularly constituted Masonic Lodge, whose Worshipful Master should be the presiding officer, assisted by a woman designated as President or Mistress.

There was a printed Ritual of the work of the Lodge issued in 1787, and we find this brief summary of its degrees:

"The first degree contains only, as it ought, moral ideals of Masonry; the second is the initiation into the first mysteries, commencing with the sin of Adam and concluding with the Ark of Noah as the first favor which God granted to men; the third and fourth are merely a series of types of figures drawn

from the Holy Scriptures, by which we explain to the candidate the virtues which she ought to practice."

Some put forth the argument that this French organization was brought to the colonies during the Revolutionary period by Lafayette, but there is no authentic history to substantiate it, and we would imagine that Lafayette during his brief stay here was too much engrossed in other things to take time to disseminate knowledge on affairs of that nature.

However, some knowledge of such an organization may have filtered through and helped to create and bring into use some of the lectures which preceded the formation of the Eastern Star. In his collection of Historic Papers relating to the Eastern Star, Bro. Alonzo J. Burton, of New York, says: "The Order (Adoptive Masonry) made its appearance in the Colonies in 1778, and it is safe to assume that it is of French importation."

Whatever may have been the earliest history of the organizations that were based on Masonry, and whatever became of them, it remained for one Dr. Robert Morris, of Kentucky, to arrange and put into some definite shape the organization known as The Eastern Star. Dr. Morris was a great traveler and lecturer on Masonry and had written many books and treatises on that subject. He had clothed Masonry with divine and symbolic meaning, Biblical lore and historic research. A man as broad-

minded as was Dr. Morris would never be quite satisfied that all the good in a secret Order like that of the Masons should be confined to men alone. There would always be in the mind of a man like that, that there should be some common ground whereon all the family could meet.

Of course we all know that women are not eligible to the degrees in Masonry, but Dr. Morris thought there might be some way by which women might share the same inspirations that prompted men to noble deeds of benevolence and charity.

It is claimed that in about the year 1850, while Dr. Morris was confined to his home from the effects of an accident, he thought out and developed the Eastern Star and thus established an order that was to reach, before a century had passed, entirely around the globe, and to number more than 2,000,000 members.

For several years Dr. Morris and many other prominent Masons gave the lectures, together with the "secrets" and "mysteries," behind closed doors, and only a chosen few enjoyed the privileges. There was no formal organization, however, yet the stories were firmly implanted into the minds of those thus enlightened, and the signs, passes and lectures were quite accurately remembered and whispered in confidence among the fortunate.

The Eastern Star organizations were first called "Constellations," but about the year 1860 the organizations were called "Families," perhaps on ac-

count of their relationship to members of the Masonic families, and between the years of 1860-1868 a number of "Families" were chartered in various parts of the country. The "Family" was succeeded by the name "Chapter," and a number of "Families" were rechartered under the name "Chapter;" one Friendship Family No. 103 in Brooklyn was chartered on January 25, 1866, and in June, 1869, was reorganized under the name of Esther Chapter No. 2; also Miriam Family No. 111, chartered on October 6, 1866, was reorganized as Miriam Chapter No. 1, of Chicago, on March 4, 1869.

In 1868 Brother Morris resolved to devote the balance of his life to Masonic explorations in the Holy Land, and as was claimed by one Robert Macoy, of New York, turned over to him all the rights and prerogatives he had in the Order of the Eastern Star. Macoy soon thereafter published a Manual or Ritual with initiation and other ceremonies for the organization of chapters and rules for their conduct. And so the Eastern Star was at last properly launched and rapidly spread throughout the United States wherever a Masonic lodge existed. However, both the Morris and the Macoy system existed. In Michigan a "Grand Lodge of Adoptive Masonry" was organized October 30, 1867, with fifteen lodges joining; and in Indiana a Grand Lodge of Adoptive Masonry was organized January 27, 1869, at Elkhart, both being built out of organizations that grew from the Morris teaching and held together by what was known as the

"Tatem Ritual," which had been arranged by John H. Tatem, of Michigan. The Indiana Grand Lodge only existed for a year and then disbanded. The Michigan Grand Lodge, however, continued, and in 1878, made the necessary changes and joined the General Grand Chapter, thus having the longest continuous record of any Eastern Star in the world.

By 1874 there had been formed a goodly number of Grand Chapters throughout the United States, and a General Grand Chapter seemed imminent. The first definite steps toward such an organization were made by Willis D. Engle, of Indiana, on August 30, 1874, when he published a letter in the New York Courier, a part of which reads thus:

"Two things, it seems to me, are needed immediately: First, a Supreme Grand Chapter, composed of representatives from the several Grand Chapters; second, a revision and general boiling down and finishing up of the Ritual which is now defective both in style and language. Let us all buckle on our armor and enter in earnest on the work of improving and extending the Order, and a very few years will place it in a very enviable position."

Brother Engle, who was an Episcopal minister, continued the agitation of this subject by writing to all prominent people in the Order in reference to it, and it was due more to his efforts than to any other one person that that organization was formed.

Finally, the Grand Chapter of Indiana took up

the agitation and sent out an invitation to all the state organizations (Grand Chapters) to meet in Indianapolis on November 15, 1876. The organization of the General Grand Chapter was perfected with Mrs. Elizabeth Butler as Most Worthy Grand Matron; Rev. J. D. Vencil, Most Worthy Grand Patron, and Rev. Willis D. Engle, Right Worthy Grand Secretary.

The General Grand Chapter has control of the Ritual, the secret work, the Labyrinth, and they can be obtained only through the office in Washington, D. C. It has its own laws, regulations and landmarks, and no constituent Grand Chapter can make any laws in conflict therewith. There are now (1969) fifty-five Grand Jurisdictions and comprise all the states of the United States except New York and New Jersey, which have their own Rituals, to this is added all the provinces of Canada and Puerto Rico. The chapters in Scotland and other British possessions also have their own Ritual, but friendly relations exist among all of these.

Chapters of the Eastern Star, and under the direct control of the General Grand Chapter, are now established in the Canal Zone, Cuba, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, and the Philippines, and the Ritual has been translated into several languages to accommodate all.

The spread of the Order, and the tremendous possibilities as yet undeveloped, show that he that developed it indeed builded better than he knew.