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Biographical Sketch of Robert Morris

Brother Robert Morris, whose name brings a thrill of pride to each Eastern Star heart was born near Boston, Mass., August 31, 1818. He became a school teacher and taught in several states, finally locating in Mount Silvan Academy for some years. Here he married in 1841. This union was blessed with what at that time was regarded as a rather small family of seven children.

In 1850 he with his family, moved to La Grange, Kentucky where they resided until his death. He was offered the chair of Ancient and Modern History in the Masonic College at La Grange, in which college he received the degree of L.L.D. After teaching a few years he became the President of the college.

Robert Morris was, during his lifetime, probably the widest known Mason in the country, if not in the world. He was crowned Poet Laureate of Free Masonry and the greatest part of his life was devoted to Masonic knowledge. He received the degree of Masonry at Oxford, Miss. in 1946 and was Grand Master of Kentucky in 1858. Brother Morris also received other degrees, orders and honors to the number of 143, among them the first Master of the Royal Solomon Lodge of Jerusalem. He also organized and opened the first Grand Lodge in the Holy Land and was honoray member of 150 Masonic bodies.

A woman who was initiated into the then new order of the Eastern Star by Robert Morris himself gives us the following vivid description of him: "He was a powerful and magnetic speaker. There would not be a movement in the hall while he was speaking for he held his audience spell bound. He was a small man with brown curly hair and a short full beard. He had the merriest blue eyes you ever saw and everyone who ever heard his voice or had shaken hands with him could never forget that hearty brotherly handclasp of his."

Robert Morris was deeply spiritual. He was a great student of the Bible and one of the most devoted Christians America produced. While in Palestine, he worked as if in the living presence of the Master. This spiritual vision of Christ he reflected in a great many of his beautiful poems.

If Brother Morris had done nothing more for Freemasonry than to have written his "Immortal Poem", "The Level and The Square" he would have won an imperishable name in the annals of the craft. But this is only one of the many, many things he did in his long and active life to promote the interests of the institution he so dearly loved.

The amount of authorship performed by this industrious student is vast, all intending to instruct and guide. He produced over three hundred songs and hymns, more than fifty of which were given to the Eastern Star and are among the most beautiful and best.

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Brother Morris for twenty years published Masonic Periodicals under various titles. In all this there is "Not one immortal thought, One line, which dying, he could wish to blot."

In his lectures a beauty, grandeur and significance are apparent that cannot fail to impress even the most careless mind.

But perhaps the most enduring and magnificent monument that he left is the Order of the Eastern Star, which owes its very existence, if not its origin to Brother Morris' generous heart, fruitful brain and untiring efforts in the face of decision, scorn and abuse.

From his very first connection with Masonry, Robert Morris was committed to a liberal interpretation of Masonry's attitude toward women. In the richness of Masonic symbolism, and in the beauty of its teachings, he found a philosophy which appealed to his own cultural nature. He was impressed with the idea, which impression became a conviction, that notwithstanding the Masonic landmark that no woman can become a Mason, this storehouse of knowledge and beauty and culture should in some way be opened so that women of Masonic relationship at least be permitted to share the benefits and privileges of Freemasonry. He began a research which did not abate until he had shaped the philosophy and evolved the ritual for the new order—one destined to become international in its scope and powerful in its influence in making Masonic knowledge and principle a family heritage.

It has been said of him that while he was a most learned and accomplished gentleman, he was very plain and unassuming, with a most pleasing personality, full of wit and humor and with a heart overflowing with love of his fellow man. He was generous and was frequently known to part with his last dollar to aid someone in distress. He passed from this life in 1818, having lived the allotted span of life, three score and ten.

THE LEVEL AND THE SQUARE

By Bob Morris, K.T.

Editor of the American Freemason

We meet upon the level and we part upon the square---
What words of precious meaning those words Masonic are!
Come, let us contemplate them--they are worthy of our thought;
With the highest and the lowest and the rarest they are fraught.

We meet upon the level, though from every station come--
The king from out his palace and the poor man from his home;
For the one must leave his diadem without the Masons' door,
And the other finds his true respect upon the checkered floor.

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We part upon the square, for the world must have its due;
We mingle with its multitude, a cold, unfriendly crew;
But the influence of our gatherings in memory is green,
And we long upon the level to renew the happy scene.

There's a world where all are equal; we are hurrying toward it fast;
We shall meet upon the level there, where the gates of death are passed;
We shall stand before the Orient, and our Master will be there
To try the blocks we offer by this unerring square.

We shall meet upon the level there, but never thence depart;
There's a mansion-- 'tis all ready--for each zealous, faithful heart;
There's a mansion and a welcome and a multitude are there
Who have met upon the level and been tried upon the square.

Let us meet upon the level, then, while laboring patient here;
Let us meet and let us labor, though the labor seems severe;
Already in the western sky the signs bid us prepare
To gather up our working tools and part upon the square.

Hands around, ye faithful Ghiblemites, the bright, fraternal chain;
We part upon the square below, to meet in heaven again.
Oh, what words of precious meaning those words Masonic are---
We meet upon the level, and we part upon the square!