

Chapter 12

MASONRY IN UTAH

Masonry died hard in Nauvoo, but it was certainly one of the casualties of the exodus. During the long journey across the plains and after the arrival of the pioneers in the West, there was no attempt to revive Masonry or perpetuate any of its institutions. Practically the only time it was ever mentioned after the exodus from Nauvoo was at Winter Quarters when President Brigham Young made reference to it during the trial of a member who refused to divulge the names of some delinquent members because they had been through the Temple at Nauvoo.

President Young denounced such "mystic ties" that would cloak a man's iniquity because he is a brother, as "devilish ties." Said he, "The devil has got up this plan to destroy the people. Do the ties of the Masonic lodge oblige Brother Packer to conceal the iniquity of a brother? No. There are no such ties."¹

"Pure friendship becomes weakened," Joseph Smith once said, "the very moment you undertake to make it stronger by penal oaths and secrecy."

If the Mormons had ever intended using Masonry for any ulterior or sinister purposes, it would have been an op-

¹ *Journal History*, March 6, 1847.

portune time to have done so after the exodus from Nauvoo. From that moment forward, the issue was treated as a dead subject, a closed book. The Nauvoo Brass Band, the Nauvoo Legion, and many other institutions and practices were transplanted to the West, but the Mormons never displayed the slightest interest in Masonry after they left Nauvoo.

In 1848 when Lucius N. Scovil was an agent for the Church assisting the Mormon immigrants as they landed at the port at New Orleans, he contacted the Masons there and through their influence was successful in securing many favors and privileges that he would not have received otherwise. This is practically the only incident on record where Masonry was relied upon as a means of fraternity after the exodus from Nauvoo.

The first Masonic activities within the boundaries of the present state of Utah were among the soldiers in General Albert Sidney Johnston's army. There were some Masons in this army which came to Utah in 1858, and they proceeded to set up a lodge at Camp Floyd. This organization was known as the Rocky Mountain Lodge, and the dispensation authorizing it was dated March 6, 1859.

This Masonic body functioned at the military camp until the soldiers were recalled to take part with the Confederacy in the Civil War. The final reference to this organization appears in the report of the Grand Master of Missouri in 1862, as follows:

Rocky Mountain Lodge No. 205, in Utah Territory has ceased to work, and placed in my hands all her movable property, consisting of her charter, jewels, books, papers, collars, gavels, text books, and \$322.00 in money, which I forwarded to the Grand Secretary. Her books and papers show that she was in a prosperous condition. This Lodge was composed principally of masons belonging to the U. S. Army, who were forced to surrender their charter on account of army being recalled to Washington City.

In Mt. Pleasant, Utah, the Masons have preserved the "square and compasses" used by Rocky Mountain Lodge. A placard accompanying them bears this information:

They were made from a camp-kettle by the blacksmith of General Albert Sidney Johnston's army, at Camp Floyd, Utah, in the year 1858. They were the first jewels used in the first legally authorized Masonic Lodge ever convened in the State of Utah*** Bro. W. H. Woodring secured them from the Senior Deacon of the first Masonic Lodge of the State of Utah, and presented them to Damascus Lodge No. 10. He was informed that these jewels were the first ever used in opening a Masonic Lodge in Utah, and were the jewels used and explained to the first Mason legally made in the state.

The first Mason buried in Utah was Luke Halloran, a member of the ill-fated Donner party.

By 1866, there were enough non-Mormon residents in Utah that a dispensation was granted for them to set up a lodge. In a short time there were two lodges in Salt Lake City. At this early date, there was a strong tendency to exclude the Mormon Masons from the organization. In the proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Nevada in 1867, it was said of this issue: "We see that some difficulty has arisen over the vexed question in Utah growing out of their Mt. Moriah Lodge U. D. It is gratifying to us, as it is complimentary to our Wasatch Lodge U. D., that it has been able to keep clear of entanglements which seem to have environed its sister lodge in Salt Lake City."

When a dispensation was granted to the first Masonic body in Salt Lake City, the Grand Master offered the following advice: "I required from the petitioners a pledge that they would carefully exclude all who were of the Mormon Faith, knowing full well, that should a person bearing the character that is universally given to that sect gain admittance within a Lodge, its peace and harmony, and consequently its usefulness, would be forever gone."

This was the first official reference to the relationship of Mormonism and Masonry in Utah. It set forth the policy which has been faithfully followed to the present time. Soon after the lodge had been opened, the following question was submitted to the Grand Master: "How are Mormons to be treated, who claim to be Masons, who present themselves and ask for the privilege of visiting?"

The following answer was given: "You will take notice that Mormons claiming to be Masons, be excluded from the right of visiting; and also that petitions for the degrees of Masonry shall not be received from any person who is known to be a Mormon."

The Grand Master later sought to justify his action by this statement: "The man who is not true to his government and faithful to the laws of his country, is unworthy of the name of Mason, and should not be admitted into the great Masonic family."

A Nevada newspaper, the *Territorial Enterprise*, summarized the popular opinion in these words:

At a late session of the Grand Lodge of F. A. M. for Nevada the matter of the petition of Mt. Moriah Lodge, of Great Salt Lake City, Utah, for a charter came before the Lodge for action. The whole affair was thoroughly investigated and a large amount of interesting correspondence read, substantial facts made apparent, and after a patient hearing of the merits of the case, the craft refused to grant charter that in any manner should recognize the peculiar institution of the Saints. We are glad to know that they will not admit Mormons and thus endorse polygamy.

This item caught the eye of T. B. H. Stenhouse, who was editor of the *Salt Lake Telegraph*, and he made the following comment:

For some length of time there has been a good deal of talk over the question of admitting or not admitting "Mormons" into Masonic Lodges in this City. So far as the L. D. S.'s are concerned

we can speak for them plainly and pointedly and say that they as a people care not the ashes of a rye straw about the question, and the action of one Grand Lodge that chooses to make religion the test of its fellowship, is simply silly and ridiculous. There are individuals among us who have had a disposition to test this question, and we opine their course in the matter has led to the action of the Mt. Moriah Lodge and the Grand Lodge of Nevada as above stated. We are promised some correspondence on this subject.²

The spirit of bitterness grew until it was climaxed in 1878, when Grand Master J. M. Orr of Utah announced this ultimatum:

We say to the priests of the Latter-day Church, you cannot enter our lodge rooms—you surrender all to an unholy priesthood. You have heretofore sacrificed the sacred obligations of our beloved Order, and we believe you would do the same again. Stand aside; we want none of you. Such a wound as you gave Masonry in Nauvoo is not easily healed, and no Latter-day Saint is, or can become a member of our Order in this jurisdiction.

A MASONIC HISTORIAN ANSWERS THE QUESTION

A few prejudiced Masonic leaders in Utah have largely been responsible for the bitterness that abounds between these two organizations in Utah. In other states this conflict is scarcely known to exist, and Mormons are invited to join the lodge.

In justification of the above assertions, I quote from the scholarly Masonic historian, Joseph E. Morcombe, the author of *The History of the Grand Lodge of Iowa*, and editor of *The Masonic World*:

A very curious and regrettable condition exists in the Masonry of Utah, which has no counterpart in the Craft anywhere in the United States, or in the fraternity elsewhere, to the best of our knowledge. It is generally known that the Mormon Church, having its seat at Salt Lake City, has long manifested a bitter antagonism toward the fraternity, and forbids its adherents from

² *Freemasonry in Utah*, a series of pamphlets by S. H. Goodwin.
Also *Masonic Education and Instruction*, September, 1924, by the same author.

joining Masonry. With this we have no concern; other churches have done the same, and are within their undisputed rights in so doing. But somewhat needlessly, as it seems to an outsider, the Grand Lodge of Utah issued a similar edict, declaring that it would not receive into any of its Lodges the petitions of members of the religious organization named. This was a work of supererogation, as such entrance was effectually barred by the church. The old law of Masonry, which makes no reference to the religious belief of its members, could have remained in force, and there would have been few if any to come from Mormonism.

But when both parties to a controversy thus agree to keep apart it is just as well or better for others to avoid meddling in the matter. However, it is well to keep the record clear, and to state our settled conviction that the edict mentioned is grossly un-Masonic and un-American. As a civic proposition such a test is violative of constitutional law. It is the boast of Masonry that the religious status of a man cannot enter into a consideration of his fitness for entrance into the fraternity, always provided that he believes in the existence of a Supreme Being, and its necessary corollary of the immortality of the soul. Thus Utah Masonry has gone against the principles of American democracy and the universal law of the fraternity, yet, as said above, the peculiar conditions that have forced such unprecedented action are settled agreeably to both parties, and are not germane to the present inquiry.

Mr. Morcombe is perhaps better acquainted with the historical facts relating to Masonry in Nauvoo than any other person in the fraternity. In this long article, which appeared in the October, 1936, issue of *The Masonic World*, he had no moral obligation to defend the Mormons or censure certain Masonic leaders in Utah unless they deserved it.

The occasion for the writing of this article was because of the embarrassment of President Frederick M. Smith of the Reorganized Church when he visited a Masonic lodge in Salt Lake City. President Smith had been a prominent Masonic leader for years and was highly respected by the members of the Order in other states. But all that Masonic

good will ceased the moment he made himself known at the lodge during his visit in Salt Lake City.

We shall return to Mr. Morcombe's account and consider this appraisal of the good will Mr. Goodwin and other Masonic authorities in Utah manifest:

Our friend is a Mason in all of good that the term implies. He is honored by his home brethren, and carries the high ideals of the Craft into all contacts with his fellow men.

Everywhere—except, as it proves, in Utah—this brother is received as a true and worthy brother. But here let him relate an experience which will be acknowledged as unusual, to say the least. It is certainly not to be recommended as an exhibition of brotherly love and the broad tolerance of Masonry. A short time ago Brother Smith was in Salt Lake City. As a Master Mason in good standing, as a Past Master, he supposed himself privileged to visit a Lodge. He says: "I decided to visit Acacia Lodge No. 17. In pursuance of such purpose I appeared early, got a committee and was examined. I gave my name as F. M. Smith, Past Master of Orient Lodge No. 646, of Kansas City, Missouri. I was admitted and watched the work with interest. Several petitions were read, in which religious persuasion and church affiliations were scrutinized. Later I was called upon for remarks. I told the brethren who I was, and the strange experience I had in finding that my own people would be considered ineligible for membership in a Utah Lodge.

"I sensed a freezing in the air. At the close of the meeting I was told by the Secretary that if the examining committee had done what it should it *would have asked me my church affiliations, and if I had told them I would have been denied the privilege of fraternal visitation.* Well, I rather enjoyed the experience. These brethren found me O.K. until they learned to what church I belonged. How's that for Masonry? And how can the Grand Lodge of Utah be brought to see its error?"

Brother Smith looks at this matter philosophically. He regards it not so much as a personal slight, but as an affront to his Lodge and to the Grand Lodge of his own home jurisdiction, which vouches for his full Masonic status. It can be held, of course, that the examining committee, or the Master, or in fact any member of the Lodge, can object to the entrance of a visitor, and he is thereby effectually barred. This is a right generally acknowledged, even though the old lists of landmarks stated as

inherent the right of any Mason to visit a Lodge. Nor is the objector in many jurisdictions obliged to state the nature or cause of his objection. Here in California the brother objecting gives his reasons to the Master, who then decides if the exclusion is justified.

But a different complexion is put on this particular matter when a brother of good standing is debarred from entrance by legislative action of Grand Lodge, declaring him ineligible for visitation because of his particular church membership. Yet here again it may be argued that a Grand Lodge, being sovereign within its jurisdiction limits, is free to pass such legislation as it sees fit, with none competent to question or make complaint. That may be true, as an extreme and largely theoretical statement. But there is such a thing as the comity of Masonry. The responsibility is upon every governing body of the Craft that its actions shall not offend others nor transcend the established usages of the fraternity. Another Grand Lodge, upon complaint of one of its worthy members thus excluded, and for such cause, would be justified in breaking off all fraternal relations with a body that had thus wantonly flouted the fraternal bond that should hold wherever regular Masonry exists. We are certain that sooner or later such conflict of views will arise. When it does the weight of informed Craft opinion and the authority of Grand Lodges generally will be against the Grand Lodge of Utah.

Some time ago a brother residing in Salt Lake City, though holding his Masonic membership in California, wrote us characterizing Utah Masonry as "a one-man affair." This is probably an exaggeration of the situation, and we have refrained from using what was in the communication giving color to the assertion, as an injustice might be done many who are silent in such matters as are here being considered. But one at all conversant with the recent history of the Craft in that jurisdiction would be justified in asking whether the influence of R. W. Brother Sam Goodwin, Grand Secretary, is wholly beneficial. For ourselves we would consider his words and action indicative of a prejudiced mind, that over-rides his knowledge of Craft principles and practices, and thus his usefulness is limited and his judgment distorted.

We have before us a pamphlet written by one C. H. Rich, a Master Mason, and also a member of the Reorganized Church. He professes an intimate knowledge of the whole process of intolerant growth in Utah so far as Masonry of the jurisdiction is concerned. He effectively contrasts the liberality and open-mindedness of his church with the intolerance that is manifested in the

legislation passed by the Grand Lodge of Utah. He attributes the departure to the influence and efforts of Brother Goodwin, which statement we have no reason to doubt; in fact, the Grand Secretary seems to glory in the fact. He declares further that a general misunderstanding exists among the brethren, and that "when the facts are known the Grand Lodge of Utah will gladly make amends for the mistake made . . ."

There is a very real danger in all this; a danger that Masonry in all the United States should perceive and upon which it should express itself in no uncertain terms. If it is possible for the Grand Lodge of Utah, following a very fallible guide, to declare that adhesion to any form of religious faith of clear standing under the law bars him from visitation or from any other rights and privileges of the Craft in that jurisdiction, there is nothing to prevent any body of Masons from adding other tests, religious or political, if you will. One could not devise any surer or speedier method of utterly destroying the Fraternity than to allow such idea to stand as good Masonic doctrine. To condone it by silence is unworthy of the jurisdictions that hold to the straightforward principles of the institution.

We have said that sooner or later a conflict is certain to arise over application of this rule. The church in question has its adherents in every state; in some of these they are numerous, and among them are many Masons. These, as such, are entitled to all rights and privileges that are of Craft membership. Without having access to figures we know that such brothers are to be found in appreciable numbers in Iowa, Missouri and in California. Any one of these could, without thought of lurking antagonism, seek to visit a Lodge within the territory of the Grand Lodge of Utah. He would be repulsed as if belonging to some spurious body, on the *ipse dixit* of some ignoramus unable to distinguish truth from error in such matter. What then would be the probable course of the offended Grand Lodge? Does Utah imagine that California or Missouri or Iowa, rightfully proud of their Masonic quality and jealous of infringement upon their rights, would take such a slight without protest? We venture the assertion that if quick and complete apology and reparation were not made there would follow a severance of fraternal relations. And with such question once brought as a concrete proposition to the forum of official discussion there would be scant sympathy for a Grand Lodge that had so far forgotten the rudiments of Masonic courtesies.

This well-known Masonic historian has given a good explanation of the conflict that exists in Utah.