

WILLIAM O. WARE LODGE OF RESEARCH

Book Review

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MASONIC HARVEST

Author: Carl H. Claudy

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A few years ago, I was listening to a Masonic podcast, where the Brother being interviewed identified himself as a playwright and said that he wanted to write plays about Freemasonry. When his host questioned him further, he said, “I’ve only found a few plays about Masonry that were written by some guy named Claude.” Alarm bells immediately went off in my head. Carl H. Claudy, who did, indeed, author at least a dozen Masonic plays, was one of the most accomplished writers in the history of Freemasonry. In addition to his plays, Brother Claudy also wrote over a dozen highly regarded books on Freemasonry and is, perhaps, best known for his many contributions to “The Short Talk Bulletin.” He also found time to serve as Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia in 1943.

In short, Carl H. Claudy should be a household name among Masons, even Masons of the 21st Century. That he is not is both lamentable and a measure of the extent to which Masons have failed to study their own history.

The purpose of this writing is to review one of M. W. Brother Claudy’s later books, *Masonic Harvest*. It is not intended to be a biography of Brother Claudy – such a work would be a volume unto itself, if done properly. That being said, a brief review of Brother Claudy’s life is necessary to establish context for his later work.

One thing that distinguishes Brother Claudy from many others who has written about Freemasonry is the fact that he was a professional writer. Born in 1879, his first great adventure was his trek to Alaska in 1898 as a prospector in the Alaskan Gold Rush. Returning home to Washington, D. C. after his quest for gold, he became the editor of a succession of publications, generally devoted to science and invention. He was a free-lance reporter for the New York Herald. Brother Claudy wrote science



fiction short stories for “The American Boy” magazine, and published four science fiction novels. Setting aside his exploits in Freemasonry, Carl H. Claudy was a talented and successful writer.

Brother Claudy became a Freemason in 1908 in Harmony Lodge No. 17 in Washington, D. C. Taken with the history and majesty of Freemasonry, Brother Claudy quickly lent his writing skills to the Masonic Arts. He became affiliated with the Masonic Service Association and served as Associate Editor of its monthly publication, “The Master Mason,” from 1923 – 1931. He is said to have contributed roughly 250 articles to “The Short Talk Bulletin.”

In 1948, M. W. Brother Claudy published *Masonic Harvest*, which is a collection of forty-four short articles about Freemasonry. All but one of the forty-four had been previously published in “The Short Talk Bulletin.”

The articles are arranged under seven different sub-headings, allowing for organization and order of content. The first such heading, “Long, Long Ago,” contains eight articles. As might be imagined, these eight writings deal with the historical and philosophical underpinnings of contemporary Freemasonry. Brother Claudy treats us to such topics as, “Hiram Abif,” “Thy Neighbor’s Landmarks” and “The Morgan Affair.” Each of these entries add valuable perspective the topic addressed. One of the entries, however, “Old Romance,” deserves special attention. Here, Brother Claudy delves into the romantic appeal of Freemasonry’s earliest origins. The continuity of Masonic traditions, spread across the many years, is a strong tie binding Craftsmen to the Fraternity. Of the several “ancient” manuscripts that exist, Claudy writes:

“To few of us is it given to see the originals and not many even see reprints. But each, from the youngest to the oldest Mason, may catch, if he will, the sweet faint perfume of days that come not back, and thrill anew, as have so many uncounted and unknown, that he does today as did ‘all good brothers and fellows who have gone this way before.’”

The second heading of selection is captioned, “Castles in Spain, “ The title comes from a Chaucer quote, and alludes to finding joy. In this section, Brother Claudy treats us to writings that include “The Master’s Jewel Speaks” and “The Third Great Light” among others. One of moist poignant articles is the first in the portion of the book and is titled, “The Lodge of Silence.” Brother Claudy reminds us of the importance of introspection in one’s life, especially with respect to one’s Masonic journey. He writes:

“There is healing in silence; there is within it comfort for the grieving, help for the troubled, wealth for the spiritually needy, strength for the spiritually wealthy.”

M. W. Brother Claudy uses the tool of introspection to remind us that Freemasonry is a spiritual endeavor, and that in silence and stillness we become open to spiritual awareness.

The third section of *Masonic Harvest* is titled “The Old Curiosity Shop.” Among the seven entries in this portion of the book, Brother Claudy addresses miscellaneous topics such as “Women Masons,” “Making a Mason ‘At Sight’” and “What’s in a Name?” Perhaps the most interesting article in this section is “What to Tell Your Wife.” M. W. Brother Claudy offers specific advice as to what to say to wives and other family members (and close friends) when asked about Freemasonry. M. W. Brother Claudy’s advice still has the ring of common sense to it.

The fourth section of the book is labeled, “Of the Watchmaker.” In this portion of *Masonic Harvest*, Brother Claudy shares his observations on the nature of The Great Architect of the Universe. The six entries here include “Masonry and Religion” and “A Mason’s Faith.” The article from this section that I chose to highlight is titled “The Doctrine of Masonry.” Brother Claudy writes here of the universal character of Freemasonry, and the brotherhood of man. He writes:

“For men only and in secret, by symbols, a Legend and the Volume of Sacred Law, Freemasonry teaches one God, father of all men, who are in this life and the immortal life to come, forever brethren” (emphasis in the original).

M. W. Brother Claudy’s thoughts here need no further interpretation.

The fifth division of *Masonic Harvest* is titled “Old Wine in New Bottles.” Contained in the six essays that comprise this portion of the book is one called, “The Enemy Within.” Here M. W. Brother Claudy is at his gravest, warning about allowing the Lodge to sink into the ordinary by losing its focus on the message of Freemasonry. Brother Claudy was by no means grim, and one only needs to read his other works to develop a sense of his appreciation for humor. But he finds no place for levity within the Lodge, especially within the performance of The Legend of the Temple.

He writes:

“What support is there in law or ritual for making a third degree into a Roman holiday, in which a sublime lesson of the greatest hope of mankind is perverted into a sort of college fraternity slapstick comedy?”

Any Mason reading this review likely understands exactly what it is to which M. W. Brother Claudy is referring. The fact that this issue exists underscores the need for more Carl Claudys and more serious instruction in the real message of Freemasonry.

The book’s sixth section contains six articles and is entitled, “Dream Dust.” Perhaps the most interesting in this collection is “When I My Son,” and is the reflection of a Lodge Master about to see his son made a Master Mason. It is a meditation on the things that a man has taught his

son, inside and outside of Freemasonry. It is an emotionally powerful essay, and represents Claudy at his best as a writer.

The seventh and final segment of *Masonic Harvest* bears the title, “Unweaving the Rainbow.” The five articles contained in this part of the book address the topics of “Mystery,” “Truth” and “Personal Masonic Philosophy.” In the latter essay, Brother Claudy emphasizes the central importance of truth, and the individual pursuit of truth, as being at the core of the individual Masonic journey.

Masonic Harvest represents some of M. W. Brother Carl H. Claudy’s best articles and essays. It is a valuable resource. Brother Claudy’s books deserve their own special section on one’s Masonic library, and *Masonic Harvest* is an important part of that section.

Masonic Harvest is available from online book sellers.