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THE INSPIRATION OF THE LABYRINTH.

Some years ago, Martha Zoercher was present at an initiatory service when the customary invitation was extended to the newly made Members to express their impressions of the work.

One new Member, a Brother, expressed himself as being favorably impressed, but wondered why an organization like the Eastern Star, founded on Christian principles, should have a character like Adah, a young girl who had been made a human sacrifice - a heathenish custom, and not in keeping with the principles as explained by the other four lecturers. This brother was also at a loss to understand the meanings of the marches that wove in and about the labyrinth - in fact, just WHY seemed to be the burden of his speech.

We wonder if there are not others who have had the same puzzling questions come to them, and if there is not perhaps an answer that will at least satisfy the enquiring mind.

When the Order of the Eastern Star was new; when the pioneers along these lines were seeking ways to make it more beautiful and lasting, the candidates, who were given the work one at a time, did not make the labyrinth marches as they are made today, but were led by the proper Officer directly from station to station around the pentagon formed by the Star Points.

Our first enquiry as to the reason for this change was directed to Sister Nettie Ransford, P. M. W. G. M., who was a Member of the General Grand Chapter at the time the change was made, and who, as Grand Conductress, demonstrated the new labyrinth march on the floor of the General Grand Chapter, when it was adopted by that body.

Sister Ransford seemed to be as much at a loss to explain WHY as the enquiring Brother, and all she could say was, "Well, it looked better that way, than the short marches from point to point, as before. It lends dignity to the work."

Failing here, we went to Brother Willis D. Engle, P. M. W. G. P., of the General Grand Chapter, who was also a Member of that body when the change was made. Brother Engle, although learned in all the history of the Order, was not able to cast any light on the question, and gave us about the same answer as had Sister Ransford: "It looks better."

Here were these two authorities on all things pertaining to Eastern Star work, and both in the dark as to the reason for so important a change. It then occurred to the writer (Sister Zoercher) that perhaps, after all, this new labyrinth was inspired; and the more we try to find a cause, the more we are convinced that such indeed was the case. The labyrinth was surely inspired.

If the reader will follow us closely we think we will be able to explain the present labyrinth march from that standpoint.

After the candidate has taken the Obligation required of her, has repeated the words that all Members of the Order must repeat, has made the pledges and promises that only Members of the Order of the Eastern Star know and understand, she is taken to Adah, where she hears the pathetic story taken from the Book of Judges. Here, a young girl, and an only child, becomes a sacrifice in order that a promise made by her father might be kept. A rash promise, perhaps, but one made in good faith, and one that he had pledged his sacred honor that he would keep. That the blow would strike his beloved and only daughter was no doubt very far from his thoughts at the time it was given; but a vow was a vow, and must sacredly be kept. And so Adah became the sacrifice - a living, human sacrifice - and the beauty of her sacrifice

was her willingness as such in order that her father's honor as a citizen and a warrior might be preserved.

And then the candidate is led around the fourth point of the Star - Martha's point. Now, Martha's plea to Jesus to restore life to her brother Lazarus, who had died, brings out that beautiful lesson of life after death, and the Resurrection of the body; but this point also reminds us of the surrender of the life of Jesus on the Cross - a human sacrifice made to fulfill the prophecies. And therein lies the similarity of these two points. Adah, an only daughter, was made a sacrifice to save her father's honor, when he made a vow unto the Lord that he would sacrifice and offer up for a burnt offering the first thing that came to meet him when he returned from war victorious; and Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, was offered up as a sacrifice for the remission of sins of us all, that whosoever that believed in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life.

And then the candidate is taken to Ruth, where she hears one of the most beautiful love stories of all time. History and literature abound in stories of the love of man for woman; but there are very few instances aside from David and Jonathon, or Damon and Pythias, where there was such a close affection between members of the same sex, as existed between Ruth and Naomi. Ruth was a woman of Moab, and, as such, was from a nation of idol worshippers. Her family was wealthy in lands and cattle, and there is nothing in the story that would indicate that she would ever be in want if she remained with her kindred and friends in her native land. But Ruth loved Naomi, and she loved Naomi's God, and her love for them was so strong that she was willing to forego luxury and ease if she remained in her native land, and go in poverty among strangers. She was willing to toil in the most severe manual labor rather than give up that which had become dearer to her than all else beside - Naomi and her God.

And then the candidate is taken from Ruth around the point of Electa, which represents love, quite the most natural place to go.

She now comes to Esther, the wonderful queen, the wisest and most beautiful of her time, and the one to whom the Jewish race owes much.

Esther's story is well known. She loved her own people, and, while her Jewish ancestry was unknown to the king, it was known to others and herself; and, when the edict was issued that would destroy the entire Hebrew race on one day, Queen Esther rose to her sublimest height and offered herself, if need be, as the sacrifice. To fail in her purpose, she well knew, would mean the death of the entire race, including herself. Knowing the King's love and admiration for herself, she risked all to save her beloved people. She heeded the call - "Perhaps thou wert born for a time like this" - and went before the king. She was successful, and the tale had a happy ending.

When the candidate leaves Esther's station, she goes around Adah's point and the similarity of these two characters can be plainly seen. Adah gave up her life to save her father's honor; and Esther was prepared and willing to give her crown and life, if need be, to save her people from destruction; but, fate, in the person of an adoring king, saved her from the cruel fate of Adah.

The candidate is then taken to Martha, the fourth point of the Star, and she hears the story of Martha's meeting with Jesus and how He tries to comfort her for the loss of her brother; when He says: "I am the Resurrection and the Life, and he that believeth on Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and he that liveth and believeth on Me shall never die." It was indeed a glorious privilege for Martha to receive this wonderful message - Martha, the humble sister who had labored that those

who came to her house might have the entertainment that honored guests should receive. You easily recall that on one occasion when Jesus was a guest in the home, that Martha complained to Him because her sister Mary had left her to do all the serving, and it seemed then that Jesus had rather chided her for doing too much for their entertainment. But, it was Martha who sought Him when in her deepest trouble, and it was to Martha that the great announcement came; to Martha, who raised her hands and implored Jesus to recall her beloved brother. I can almost see her now, her toil-worn hands, and her tear-stained face, as she kneels, pleading for that which she earnestly believed the Master could grant. How great was her faith! And, to Martha came the message, the greatest that was ever given to any human being, and the message that is the very foundation of our Christian faith.

And then there follows that which to my mind is the most beautiful sentiment in the entire labyrinth. After the point in which Jesus stands out most prominently, the candidate is led around the point of Ruth. Now, Ruth was the ancestress of Jesus through her marriage with Boaz on down in direct line to David, for Jesus was often alluded to as "The Prince of the House of David," so we can see the appropriateness of this point of the march.

The candidate is then taken to the point of Electa, where she hears the wonderful story of Love - love for God, and all mankind. Electa served through her great love for God, and finally suffered the fate of the early Christian martyrs because she would not renounce her faith. It was the Master who said "I give unto you a new commandment, that ye love one another even as I have loved you."

Following the lecture on love, at Electa's station, the candidate is led around Esther's point. Now, Esther represents Purity, and here we have love and purity linked together in the labyrinth, and these two attributes are the crowning glory of womanhood. But when the Master spoke of purity, He made no sex distinction, for what was pure and sacred for women was equally pure and sacred for men - no double standard of morality where the Master was concerned. You will remember that when the cringing woman was cast at His feet, the punishment for whose crime was stoning to death, the Master said, "Let him that is within fault cast the first stone" - and not a stone was cast.

And so we have completed the labyrinth march; we have joined the points that seem to have something in common. We have shown the relation between the story of Adah and that of Martha; of Ruth with that of Electa; the story of Esther has been compared with Adah; the message of Martha with the point of Ruth; and that of Electa with the point of Esther; and in every instance there was some characteristic of the one that bound it up with that of the other. Through it all, on every march, the open Holy Bible lay on the Altar as the candidate was led by, thus indicating that absolute reliance upon the Scriptures is essential to our faith and well-being.

And, finally the candidate is led out of the labyrinth around the outside of the points, in the only circular movement in the initiatory march, thus drawing up the beautiful lessons that have been given by the heroines of the Order, to the Altar, where the Obligation is taken, and to the Bible, which is the Christian's law-book.

Then, will you not, my friends, agree with me that the labyrinth, whose intricacies fail of any other solution, was indeed INSPIRED?

- Martha Zoercher, P. W. G. M. of
Indiana.