

THE BLUE FORGET-ME-NOT" ANOTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

By Bro. ALAIN BERNHEIM

[We have been asked about the four leaf clover and the Forget-Me-Not and Freemasonry. We know of no connection with the former but much has been written regarding the latter. Here is an article that analyses the subject in great detail - Ed.]

In a paper that was published in *The Philalethes* in February 1997, I contrasted the little-known courage of a small minority of German Masons who opposed the Nazis publicly with the until-recently-ignored cooperative attitude of the great majority of German Freemasons and Grand Lodges toward the Hitler regime in the 1930s.

It was outside the scope of that paper to mention that about 1946 leading German Masons secretly agreed never to mention Masonic events from the 1920-1935 period. The first public Declaration of the United Grand Lodge of Germany, issued on 22 January 1949, gave a version of the past which had little in common with factual truth. It asserted that not one single German Mason had taken part in the Nazi crimes, which may have been true. Nevertheless, in 1949, former members of the Nazi party such as Wilhelm Lorenz (a member since 1 July 1936), Hermann Dörner (1 March 1937), Udo Sonanini (1 January 1938), Kurt Hendrikson (1 January 1941), Herbert Kessler (1 May 1941) and Karl Hoede (with the personal authorization of Hitler from 4 August 1942 since he was a Mason from 1920 to July 1933; Hoede's son married Theodor Vogel's daughter) already were or became soon prominent Masons under the new German republic.

In February 1953, German Grand Master Theodor Vogel said before the Grand Master's Conference in Washington: 'It will therefore be apparent to you all how immensely difficult it was after fifteen years of ban and persecution to found the Lodges again and build them up. It is to the credit of my good friend and brother Ray Denslow, P.G.M., who, together with P.G.M. Dietz, visited Germany on behalf of the Masonic Service Association in 1949, that he in his report "After Fifteen Years" described this work with all its difficulties, its troubles, its obstacles...'. [iii] With these words, he was merely acknowledging the fact that his public relations operation had been a success.

In 1945 and in 1949, The Masonic Service Association had sent two delegations headed by Bro. Ray V. Denslow, P.G.M. of Missouri, to Germany. Among the first delegation was Judge (Bro.) George Edward Bushnell, then Grand Lieutenant Commander of the Supreme Council, Northern Masonic Jurisdiction of the U.S.A. Bro. Martin Dietz, P.G.M. of New Jersey, who spoke German fluently, belonged to the second one. The report signed by Denslow and Dietz proves that American delegates received biased and incomplete information. It did not mention once the Symbolic Grand Lodge of Germany or the Supreme Council for Germany, both founded in 1930, the only German Masonic bodies which openly resisted Hitler. Nor did it mention the declarations of Prussian Grand Lodges which openly supported him in 1933 and 1934. It depicted an imaginary German Freemasonry too weak to resist the Nazis and forcibly dissolved in 1933. That information, which reflected the agreement to forget the past, mostly originated in

Theodor Vogel. Had the American delegates been fully informed of the attitude of most German Masons in the 1930s, I presume that their report would have been different.

Vogel (1901-1977) was made a Mason in 1926, became Assistant Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of the Sun (Bayreuth) in 1947 and its Grand Master one year later. He certainly tried his best to unite the pre-war German Grand Lodges, partly succeeded, and was elected at the head of the (first) United Grand Lodge (singular) of Germany, 8 October 1948. His success was a partial one only, then the National Grand Lodge (Grosse Landesloge) declined to join Vogel's United Grand Lodge and founded a Union of Christian Grand Lodges of Germany of its own which was recognized by the Swedish Grand Lodge in 1953.

However contemporary relevant speeches and declarations, especially those made by the German Christian Orders – as the three Prussian Grand Lodges chose to rename themselves – were kept secret for a long time. In a paper he read in June 1973 before Quatuor Coronati Lodge in London, Ellic Howe was the first English-speaking Mason to quote from their circular letters issued in 1933. He came to the following conclusion: 'The position in January 1934, a year after the Nazis came to power, was that the three German Christian Orders had at least survived. In spite of all their protestations of loyalty to the National Socialist regime and its ideology they were tolerated but no more'. The United Grand Lodge of England prevented the paper from being printed in AQC 86. A typewritten note at the head of the distributed advance copies of Howe's paper said: 'The UGL of England, for reasons best known to its "Rulers of the Craft" refused publication to this article'. It appeared eventually in AQC 95 (1982).

ALLEN E. ROBERTS' LETTER AND THE PAMPHLET

In 1996, I received a letter from Bro. Allen Roberts, announcing I had been elected a member of the Masonic Brotherhood of the Blue Forget-Me-Not, and explaining: 'This symbol was born in the face of Nazi persecution of Freemasonry under the Hitler regime. Although the dictator ordered thousands of Freemasons murdered, tortured and incarcerated, those who would not renounce the Craft and its teachings continued to practice Freemasonry in secret. So they might know each other, a little flower was selected as their emblem.'

Together with his letter, Bro. Roberts sent me a pamphlet of twelve unnumbered pages, The Masonic Brotherhood of the Blue Forget-Me-Not. On page 3, a short text of three paragraphs, possibly written by Roberts himself, began thus: 'As early as 1934, it became evident that Hitler and his Nazi dupes would endeavor to eradicate Freemasonry. The Grossloge zur Sonne (Grand Lodge of the Sun) needed a more subtle symbol than the Square and Compasses to identify its Brethren. An unobtrusive little blue flower, the , was chosen as its Masonic symbol.' The second paragraph quoted words by David C. Boyd from a paper issued in The Philaethes in April 1987 which is mentioned below. There then followed the prerequisites for becoming a member. Page 4 was devoted to a meeting of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons in the Province of Ontario in April 1973 and to the Address on the little blue flower then made by a visitor named Gunter Gall. Pages 5-6 explained who the Founders were, and stated 'The first awards were made on January 1, 1971'. The remaining pages contained the list of 'Members Awarded The Masonic

Brotherhood of the Blue Forget-Me-Not (Masonic Educators and Writers) January 1, 1971 to January 1, 1993’.

I was moved by the distinction, especially since I had been arrested by the Gestapo in Paris when I was twelve. However, since I was somewhat familiar with the history of German Freemasonry between both World Wars, the mention of an emblem worn by German Freemasons under the Hitler regime sounded a bit odd. Many German Freemasons wear nowadays a pin instead of the more conspicuous square and compasses to show that they belong to the Craft. But since when and why? I did not know.

ERNST GEPPERT’S POINTS

Two years later, my friend Bro. Pierre Noël sent me the copy of a letter recently written by one of Germany’s foremost living historians, Bro. Ernst-G. Geppert. Geppert, who was born in 1918, and has been a Freemason since 1951. Besides numerous papers, he published in 1974 a tremendous piece of scholarship: the first full list of all German lodges since 1737. His letter was addressed to the Master of a newly-founded German Lodge which had selected the blue Forget-Me-Not as Lodge jewel, and explained why in a printed note. Geppert wrote to the Master correcting the mistakes in the note and closed with the dry remark: ‘You might perhaps at some time choose to adjust your version to the factual one’.

Geppert made the following points :

1. The Grand Lodge zur Sonne (Bayreuth) used to let a pin be made for its yearly meetings and it gave one to each delegate. Those made for the meeting held in Bremen about 1926 represented a , and were manufactured in a factory located in Selb, a small town near Bayreuth. The Brethren from Bayreuth never thought of replacing the Square and Compasses with a Forget-Me-Not.
2. In 1934, the Nazis invented the so-called Winterhilfswerk, which consisted in collecting money on the streets during specific weeks in winter. The money was in fact used for rearmament. Youngsters were requested to participate, and Geppert happened to be one of those who received about one hundred badges, sometimes pins, to be sold at a minimum price. Different ones were chosen each winter and they were worn only during the time of a collection to identify those who had already contributed.
3. By an extraordinary coincidence, the badge used by the Nazis for the collection made in March 1938 happened to be the very pin chosen by the Freemasons in 1926 and it was made by the same factory in Selb. No doubt, comments Geppert, Freemasons who attended the Bremen meeting of 1926 were glad to wear it again twelve years later. However it is out of question that such a pin could have been worn after the March 1938 collection: wearing a mark or a badge which did not originate in the Party was a criminal offence under the Nazi regime.
4. When Grand Master Vogel installed a new Lodge at Selb in 1948, he remembered the story of the pin. Since the factory and the mould still existed, he let a large quantity be made anew and distributed them as a token of friendship whenever he made official visits abroad, especially in the U.S.A., where Geppert accompanied him in 1961.
5. This explains why the blue Forget-Me-Not turned out to be regarded as an official German Masonic emblem after the war. Geppert heard Grand Master Vogel tell the 1938 story while in

America, and admits he told it himself. However, writes Geppert, the point made was outwitting the Nazis and their Winterhilfe badge.

6. This also explains why, when American Masons later founded military Lodges in Germany, some of them chose that flower as a Lodge's name. Such is the case of Lodge No. 896, 'Forget me not', in Heilbronn, warranted by the American Canadian Grand Lodge in 1965.

THE TAU PAPER BY KLAUS MÜLLER AND THE 'ENGLISH' DOCUMENT

In volume II. (1995) of TAU, the biannual publication of the German Quatuor Coronati Lodge of Research, I discovered a short paper written by the Master of the Lodge, Bro. Klaus Müller, stating that each newly-admitted Mason within the Grand Lodge of British Freemasons in Germany received a pin together with a printed story of the emblem, whereas the American Canadian Grand Lodge gave such a pin to Master Masons when they were raised. The paper included the facsimile of a text entitled 'The True Story behind This Beloved Emblem of the Craft in Germany' which ended thus: 'In most Lodges, this is presented to new Master Masons, at which time its history is briefly explained'. Klaus Müller did not specify which Masonic body issued that text, though he introduced it as 'the English text'.

HAROLD DAVIDSON'S DOCUMENTS

I asked Harold Davidson, Librarian of The Philalethes Society, to send me any paper or document he might be aware of related to the story. He did so at once, and I wish to express my gratitude for his brotherly help.

One document Harold sent me was the Xerox copy of an undated 'Presentation card issued by the American Canadian Grand Lodge, AF&AM, within the United Grand Lodges of Germany' entitled 'The Story behind This Beloved Emblem of the Craft in Germany'. It mentions that a pin is presented to newly-made Masons in most Lodges of that Jurisdiction (accordingly, one of Klaus Müller's statements appears likely wrong).

Harold also sent me a paper written by David G. Boyd, MPS, 'Das Vergissmeinnicht', which appeared in The Philalethes in April 1987. The author relied on Ellic Howe's paper for general information about German Freemasonry and the Nazis. For the Masonic origin of the blue Forget-Me-Not, Bro. Boyd's authority was a speech made by a Bro. Gunter Gall at the Royal Arch Grand Chapter Meeting of April 1973, quoted in the pamphlet Allen Roberts sent to me: 'Throughout the entire Nazi era, a little blue flower in a lapel marked a brother. In the concentration camps and in the cities, a little blue [flower] distinguished the lapels of those who refused to allow the Light of Masonry to be extinguished. When in 1947, the Grand Lodge of the Sun was reopened in Bayreuth, a little blue pin; the shape of a Forget-Me-Not was proposed and adopted as the official emblem of the first Annual Convention of those who had survived the bitter years of semi-darkness, bringing the Light of Masonry once again into the Temples. A year later, at the first Annual Convention of the United Grand Lodges of Germany, A.F. and A.M., the pin was adopted as an official Masonic emblem honouring those valiant brethren who carried on their work under adverse [!] conditions. Thus did a simple little flower blossom forth into a

meaningful emblem of the Fraternity, becoming perhaps the most widely worn pin among Freemasons in Germany.’

Bro. Boyd’s comment to the above: ‘it is unlikely that it was often worn even in the dark days of the Third Reich... it is unlikely such a symbol would have long remained unknown, unless it was employed most sparingly’.

ALLEN E. ROBERTS’ WRITINGS

In his famous *Seekers of Truth* (1988), Allen E. Roberts wrote ‘But not all German Freemasons submitted the wiles of Adolf Hitler and his regime. Some of the more dedicated Master Masons went underground. For identification they wore a little flower called a “blue [flower].” This later became a national Masonic symbol in Germany.’

Two years later in *The Northern Light*, he sounded a bit more cautious: ‘Myth: Persecuted German Freemasons wore a blue Forget-Me-Not for identification after 1934. Fact: This has been accepted as fact by most scholars but still questioned by a few. Cyril Batham of England, for instance, disputes the date. He claims it was adopted in the 1920s as a badge of friendship. His report and previous accounts agree that it was the Grossloge zur sonne (Grand Lodge of the Sun) that developed the symbol. Earlier reports say this Grand Lodge designed it as a means of evading the Gestapo; Batham claims it was simply an emblem selected because the Square and Compasses wasn’t worn by Freemasons. Most important, though, the early accounts and Batham do agree the blue Forget-Me-Not was worn throughout the Nazi terror. This emblem was also chosen to honor Masonic writers and educators through The Masonic Brotherhood of the Blue Forget-Me-Not. This group was organized in 1972.’

CONCLUSION

Nobody ever said seriously ‘I have just invented a tradition’. A clever person would like his friends to believe that the legend which had just come to his mind was an old one which, for some unknown reason, became forgotten, extinct, or both. He would rather say: ‘I have rediscovered a very old tradition’. In October 1987 Bro. Boyd wrote: ‘The more you dig into any facet of Freemasonry, the more you inevitably find. Unfortunately, it often happens that what you find may be difficult to prove or downright untrue. The story of the Forget-Me-Not is just one such case’. How right he was!

What I was able to find about the Masonic tradition surrounding the blue Forget-Me-Not amounts to very little. It is true that the flower was used by some German Masons about 1926, and it appears likely that in March 1938 some of them did wear it again as a Nazi badge, even though by an extraordinary coincidence, it had been chosen as a Masonic emblem twelve years earlier. It is likely not true that it was ever worn after March 1938 as a secret mean of recognition. However, even if many German Masons (together with the great majority of German citizens of that time) never objected to the Nazi politics and went so far as to support Hitler, some were brave enough to fight him openly. My estimation, based on the membership of

all the then existing German Lodges, is that they amounted to 1 or 2%. Out of the 174 Lodges which participated in the creation of the first United Grand Lodge of Germany, five only belonged to the Symbolical Grand Lodge of 1930, the only German Grand Lodge which resisted Hitler.

For human and political reasons as well, those Masons who thought it their duty to rebuild German Freemasonry once the War was over could hardly tell the whole truth to their foreign brethren. I personally believe they might have told the story of those dark years in a different way, but I am ready to admit that it is probably easier to say so in 2000 than in the 1950s.

Accordingly a legend was born. Not the legend of the Forget-Me-Not, but that of a German Freemasonry too weak to resist, banned as soon as Hitler became Chancellor of the German Reich, wearing a badge on the streets and – of all things! – in concentration camps!! [This would have been Punishable by Death] That legend was likely born as the result of an unconscious effort to inhibit the past as well as a conscious maneuver. It was believed not only because it was the logical thing to do, but also because it was reassuring to imagine Freemasons acting according to their ideals, fighting for freedom and defending it.

Let's keep it at that and let us admit to the Masonic Brotherhood of the Forget-Me-Not [all Freemasons] are those who, as Allen E. Roberts put it once, 'continue the battle'.