

“SIMPKINS STORE”
An Oration by Dr. Bing Johnson, 32° KCCH
Orator of the Grand Junction Scottish Rite Bodies



The reading of *THE LODGE OVER SIMPKINS' STORE* written by Lawrence N. Greenleaf, Grand Master in 1800 and poet laureate of Freemasonry is an annual event for me because it makes me think about some important aspects of Masonry. Besides it is a great poem.

“Friendship Lodge” is located in South Park City adjacent to Fairplay, CO. This poem is recited annually by a Mason dressed in clothing of that time. The poem can be found in the *COLORADO CRAFTSMAN*.

THE LODGE ROOM OVER SIMPKIN'S STORE

Lawrence Greenleaf

The plainest lodge room in the land was over Simpkin's store,
Where Friendship Lodge had met each month for fifty years or more.
When o'er the earth the moon, full orb'd, had cast her brightest beam
The brethren came from miles around on horseback and in team,
And Ah! what hearty grasp of hand, what welcome met them there,
As mingling with the waiting groups they slowly mount the stair
Exchanging fragmentary news or prophecies of crop
Until they reach the Tiler's room and current topics drop

To turn their thoughts to nobler themes they cherish and adore
And which were heard on meeting night up over Simpkin's store.

To city eyes, a cheerless room, long usage had defaced
The tell-tale line of lath and beam on wall and ceiling traced.
The light from oil fed lamps was dim and yellow in its hue
The carpet once could pattern boast, though now 'twas lost to view;
The altar and the pedestals that marked the stations three
The gate post pillars topped with balls, the rude carved letter G,
Were village joiner's clumsy work, with many things beside
Where beauty's lines were all effaced and ornament denied.
There could be left no lingering doubt, if doubt there was before,
The plainest lodge room in the land was over Simpkin's store.

While musing thus on outward form the meeting time drew near,
And we had glimpse of inner life through watchful eye and ear.
When Lodge convened at gavel's sound with officers in place,
We looked for strange, conglomerate work, but could no error trace.
The more we saw, the more we heard, the greater our amaze
To find those country brethren there so skilled in Mason's ways.
But greater marvels were to come before the night was through,
Where unity was not mere name, but fell on earth like dew,
Where tenets had the mind imbued, and truths rich fruit age bore,
In the plainest lodge room in the land, up over Simpkin's store.

To hear the record of their acts was music to the ear,
We sing of deeds unwritten which on angel's scroll appear,
A WIDOW'S CASE - four helpless ones - Lodge funds were running low -
A dozen brethren sprang to feet and offers were not slow.
Food, raiment, things of needful sort, while one gave loads of wood,
Another, shoes for little ones, for each gave what he could.
Then spake the last: "I haven't things like these to give - but then,-
Some ready money may help out" and he laid down a ten.'
Were brother cast on darkest square upon life's checkered floor,
A beacon light to reach the white--was over Simpkin's store.

Like scoffer who remained to pray, impressed by sight and sound,
The faded carpet 'neath our feet was now like holy ground.
The walls that had such dingy look were turned celestial blue,
The ceiling changed to canopy where stars were shining through.
Bright tongues of flame from altar leaped, the G was vivid blaze,
All common things seemed glorified by heaven's reflected rays.
O! Wondrous transformation wrought through ministry of love -
Behold the LODGE ROOM BEAUTIFUL! - fair type of that above.
The vision fades - the lesson lives - while taught as ne'er before,
In the plainest lodge room in the land - up over Simpkin's store.

Masonry regards no man solely for his worldly goods. Likewise Masonry regards no lodge solely because of its magnificent building, ornately decorated lodge rooms, fine regalia, full treasury or large membership.

The largest and wealthiest lodge has the same number of officers and they perform the same duties as those officers in the smallest less affluent lodge. It isn't the size of the Lodge it's the size of each individual Mason and what he does that makes the difference.