

## BROTHERS AND BUILDERS. 3

By Joseph Fort Newton.

### THE SQUARE

The Holy Bible lies open upon the Altar of Masonry, and upon the Bible lie the Square and Compasses. They are the three Great Lights of the Lodge, at once its Divine warrant and its chief working tools. They are symbols of Revelation, Righteousness, and Redemption, teaching us that by walking in the light of Truth, and obeying the law of Right, the Divine in man wins victory over the earthly. How to live is the one important matter, and he will seek far without finding a wiser way than that shown us by the Great Lights of the Lodge.

The Square and Compasses are the oldest, the simplest, and the most universal symbols of Masonry. All the world over, whether as a sign on a building, or a badge worn by a Brother, even the profane know them to be emblems of our ancient Craft. Some years ago, when a business firm tried to adopt the Square and Compasses as a trade-mark, the Patent Office refused permission, on the ground, as the decision said, that "there can be no doubt that this device, so commonly worn and employed by Masons, has an established mystic significance, universally recognized as existing; whether comprehended by all or not, is not material to this issue." They belong to us, alike by the associations of history and the tongue of common report.

Nearly everywhere in our Ritual, as in the public mind, the Square and Compasses are seen together. If not interlocked, they are seldom far apart, and the one suggests the other. And that is as it should be, because the things they symbolize are interwoven. In the old days when the earth was thought to be flat and square, the Square was a emblem of the Earth, and later, of the earthly element in man. As the sky is an arc or a circle, the implement which describes a Circle became the symbol of the heavenly, or skyey spirit in man. Thus the tools of the builder became the emblems of the thoughts of the thinker; and nothing in Masonry is more impressive than the slow elevation of the Compasses above the Square in the progress of the degrees. The whole meaning and task of life is there, for such as have eyes to see.

Let us separate the Square from the Compasses and study it alone, the better to see its further meaning and use. There is no need to say that the Square we have in mind is not a Cube, which has four equal sides and angles, deemed by the Greeks a figure of perfection. Nor is it the square of the carpenter, one leg of which is longer than the other, with inches marked for measuring. It is a small, plain Square, unmarked and with legs of equal length, a simple try-square used for testing the accuracy of angles, and the precision with which stones are cut. Since the try-square was used to prove that angles were right, it naturally became an emblem of accuracy, integrity, rightness. As stones are cut to fit into a building, so our acts and thoughts are built together into a structure of Character, badly or firmly, and must be tested by a moral standard of which the simple try-square is a symbol.

So, among Speculative Masons, the tiny try-square has always been a symbol of morality, of the basic rightness which must be the test of every act and the foundation of character and society. From the beginning of the Revival in 1717 this was made plain the teaching of Masonry, by the fact that the Holy Bible was placed upon the Altar, along with the square and Compasses. In one of the earliest catechisms of the Craft, dated 1725, the question is asked: "How many make a Lodge?" The answer is specific and unmistakable: "God and the square, with five or seven right or perfect Masons." God and the Square, Religion and Morality, must be present in every Lodge as its ruling Lights, or it fails of being a just and truly constituted Lodge. In all lands, in all rites where Masonry is true to itself, the Square is a symbol of righteousness, and is applied in the light of faith in God.

God and the Square - it is necessary to keep the two together in our day, because the tendency of the time is to separate them. The idea in vogue to-day is that morality is enough, and that faith in God - if there be a God - may or may not be important. Some very able men of the Craft insist that we make the teaching of Masonry too religious. Whereas, as all history shows, if faith in God grows dim, morality becomes a mere custom, if not a cobweb, to be thrown off lightly. It is not rooted in reality, and so lacks authority and sanction. Such an idea, such a spirit - so wide-spread in our time, and finding so many able and plausible advocates - strikes at the

foundations, not only of Masonry, but of all ordered and advancing social life. Once let men come to think that morality is a human invention, and not a part of the order of the world, and the moral law will lose both its meaning and its power. Far wiser was the old book entitled *All in All and the Same Forever*, by John Davies, and dated 1607, though written by a non-Mason, when it read the reality and nature of God in this manner: "Yet I this form of formless Deity drew by the Square and Compasses of our Creed."

For, inevitably, a society without standards will be a society without stability, and it will one day go down. Not only nations, but whole civilizations have perished in the past, for lack of righteousness. History speaks plainly in this matter, and we dare not disregard it. Hence the importance attached to the Square of Virtue, and the reason why Masons call it the great symbol of their Craft. It is a symbol of that moral law upon which life must rest if it is to stand. A man may build a house in any way he likes, but if he expects it to stand and be his home, he must adjust his structure to the laws and forces that rule in the material realm. Just so, unless we live in obedience to the moral laws which God has written in the order of things, our lives will fall and end in wreck. When a young man forgets the simple Law of the Square, it does not need a prophet to foresee what the result will be. It is like a problem in geometry.

Such has been the meaning for the Square as far back as we can go. Long before our era we find the Square teaching the same lesson which it teaches us to-day. In one of the old books of China, called *The Great Learning*, which has been dated in the fifth century before Christ, we read that a man should not do unto others what he would not have them do unto him; and the writer adds, "this is called the principle of acting on the square." There it is, recorded long, long ago. The greatest philosopher has found nothing more profound, and the oldest man in his ripe wisdom has learned nothing more true. Even Jesus only altered it from the negative to the positive form in His Golden Rule. So, everywhere, in our Craft and outside, the Square has taught its simple truth which does not grow old. The deputy Provincial Grand Master of North and East Yorkshire recovered a very curious relic, in the form of an old brass Square found under the foundation stone of an ancient bridge near Limerick, in 1830. On it was inscribed the date, 1517, and the following words:-

"Strive to live with love and care  
Upon the Level, by the Square."

How simple and beautiful it is, revealing the oldest wisdom man has learned and the very generous of our Craft. In fact and truth, the Square rules the Mason as well as the Lodge in which he labours. As soon as he enters a Lodge, the candidate walks with square steps round the square pavement of a rectangular Lodge. All during the ceremony his attitude keeps him in mind of the same symbol, as if to fashion his life after its form. When he is brought to light, he beholds the Square upon the Altar, and at the same time sees that it is worn by the Master of the Lodge, as the emblem of his office. In the north-east corner he is shown the perfect Ashlar, and told that it is the type of a finished Mason, who must be a Square-Man in thought and conduct, in word and act. With every art of emphasis the Ritual writes this lesson in our hearts, and if we forget this first truth the Lost Word will remain forever lost.

For Masonry is not simply a Ritual; it is a way of living. It offers us a plan, a method, a faith by which we may build our days and years into a character so strong and true that nothing, not even death, can destroy it. Each of us has in his own heart a little try-square called Conscience, by which to test each thought and deed and word, whether it be true or false. By as much as a man honestly applies that test in his own heart, and in his relations with his fellows, by so much will his life be happy, stable, and true. Long ago the question was asked and answered: "Lord who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart." It is the first obligation of a Mason to be on the Square, in all his duties and dealings with his fellow men, and if he fails there he cannot win anywhere. Let one of our poets sum it all up:-

"It matters not whate'er you lot  
Or what your task may be,  
One duty there remains for you,  
One duty stands for me.  
Be you a doctor skilled and wise,  
Or do your work for wage,  
A laborer upon the street,  
An artist on the stage;

One glory still awaits for you,  
One honor that is fair,  
To have men say as you pass by:  
"That fellow's on the square."

"Ah, here's a phrase that stands for much,  
'Tis good old English, too;  
It means that men have confidence  
In everything you do.  
It means that what you have you've earned  
And that you've done your best,  
And when you go to sleep at night  
Untroubled you may rest.  
It means that conscience is your guide,  
And honor is your care;  
There is no greater praise than this:  
"That fellow's on the square."

"And when I die I would not wish  
A lengthy epitaph;  
I do not want a headstone large,  
Covered with fulsome chaff.  
Pick out no single deed of mine,  
If such a deed there be,  
To 'grave upon my monument,  
For those who came to see.  
Just this one phrase of all I choose,  
To show my life was fair:  
'Here sleepeth now a fellow who  
Was always on the square."

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