

LECTURE ON THE TRACING BOARD OF THE DEGREE OF MARK MASTER MASON



The marks used by Mark Master Masons, while extremely varied in the number of points comprised in the figure selected, as well as in character generally, are many of them taken from the ornaments, emblems, jewels or tools used in the Order, and these are symbolical of sundry moral truths inculcated by Freemasonry. Each of the ancient operative Masons employed at the building of King Solomon's Temple was enabled to distinguish his own work by the particular mark or symbol cut thereon and by the same means each craftsman's work was known to the Overseer. From the number of symbols thus used, the following have been chosen as pre-eminently illustrative of the teachings of this branch of our Ancient Order, and to them we attach symbolical explanations.

- 1.-the Volume of the Sacred Law we place first as the foundation of the entire masonic system. The sacred writings are to govern our faith; on them we obligate our candidates. They were given by God as the unerring standard of truth and justice, to enable us to regulate our lives and actions by the divine precepts they contain. These words of masonic light are our surest guides, and from them we ascertain how to form our bodies into temples of happiness by learning to practise the whole duty of man.
- 2.-the All-seeing Eye reminds us all of the constant vigilance and unceasing watchfulness of the Great Overseer of the Universe, to whom, whatever be our creed or race, we are taught to attribute not only the creation, but the preservation of all things. Whatever may be our faults, however we may neglect the various tasks allotted to us in our several stations, whether indolence or apathy causes us to become indifferent to the call of duty-the eye of omniscience never slumbers or sleeps but exercises an unwearied supervision over the actions and affairs of the whole human race. These considerations ought to induce us at all times to take heed to our steps, to be cautious in our demeanour, to avoid offending with the tongue, and so to direct our conduct in every relation of life as to give evidence of the sincerity of our conviction that we are always under the all-seeing eye of the Almighty.
- 3.-the Chisel is emblematic of discipline and education. The mind in its natural state is rude and unpolished as the rough ashlar; and as the effect of the chisel on the external surface of the latter is to expose its hidden beauties, so education brings out the latent virtues of the mind, thereby displaying the perfection of human knowledge-our duty to God and man.
- 4.-the Plumb Rule is used by operative Masons to try and adjust uprights when fixing them upon their proper bases; but we, as speculative Masons, use it to denote justness and uprightness of life and actions. As the building which is not perpendicular, must of necessity be insecure and likely to fall to the ground, so he whose life is not supported by an upright course of conduct, but whose principles are swayed by the uncertain dictates of interest or passion, must soon sink in the estimation of the good and virtuous: while, on the other hand, the upright and unwavering man, who, neither bending beneath the attacks of adversity nor yielding to the temptations of prosperity, turns not to the right hand or to the left from the strict path of duty, will ever stand erect amid the fiercest tempests of fortune, and be far above the frowns of the envious and the slanders of the malignant.
- 5.-the Mallet is used practically to knock off superfluous excrescences and morally teaches us to correct irregularities, to maintain a quiet demeanour in the school of discipline, and to learn to be content. What the mallet is to the workman, enlightened reason is to the speculative Mason. It curbs ambition, teaches us to restrain envy, to moderate anger and to encourage harmony and brotherly love.
- 6.-the Trowel is an implement used in operative Masonry to spread the cement which binds all the parts of the building into one common mass. Symbolically it teaches us to spread the cement of affection and kindness, which unites all the members of the Masonic family, wheresoever dispersed over the face of the globe, into one great companionship of brotherly love, relief and truth.
- 7.- Jacob's Ladder is symbolical of the hope we as Masons entertain of reaching unto the heavens, after a well spent life in this earthly abode. It is composed of several staves or rounds, the three principal of which point out three moral virtues- faith, hope and charity.

The first represents faith in the Volume of the Sacred Law. By means of the doctrines contained in that holy book, we are enabled to ascend to the second step, representing hope. This naturally creates in us a desire of becoming partakers of the blessed promises of salvation.

The third and last, representing charity, comprehends the whole; for the Mason who is possessed of that virtue in its most ample sense may justly be deemed to have attained the very summit of his profession.

- 8.- the Twenty-four Inch Gauge is used by operative Masons to measure their work. To us, as speculative Masons, it represents the proper application of the twenty-four hours of the day- part in prayer to Almighty God, part in labour and refreshment, and part to serve a friend or brother in time of need, that being not detrimental to ourselves or connections.

9.- the Square and Compasses may be thus symbolized. The square teaches us to regulate our lives and actions by Masonic line and rule, and to harmonize our conduct by the precepts of virtue. The compasses teach us to limit our desires in every station of life, that, rising to eminence by merit, we may live respected and die regretted.

10.- the Hour-glass is an emblem reminding us, by the quick passage of its sands, of the transitory nature of human life. If by chance we escape the numerous evils incident to childhood and youth and with health and vigour arrive at manhood, we must ultimately leave this scene of probation. Let us, therefore, endeavour to improve the remaining space of life, so that when we are summoned hence to our reckoning, we may take our place in those blessed regions where dwell eternal life and light.

11. - the Rope and Anchor as here depicted are emblematic of a firmly-grounded hope arising from a well-spent life, and of that spiritual rope and anchor by which we shall be safely moored in a peaceful haven where "the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest", and where we may hope to be welcomed by the joyful salutation-"Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord".

12.- the Level, is an instrument used by operative Masons to lay levels and prove horizontals. With us it is an emblem of equality. In the sight of God, who alone is great, all men are equal, subject to the same infirmities, hastening to the same goal, and preparing to be judged by the same immutable law. Let us then ever remember that, however we may now differ in rank and fortune, we are all brethren, and that a time will come when all distinctions must cease save those of piety and goodness.

13.- the Axe was an instrument of punishment used by various nations, and is prominent in this degree as the emblem of office of the Junior Warden. Armed with this weapon, it was the duty of the ancient Junior Warden to stand on the left of the ancient Senior Warden during the payment of wages to the different classes of workmen employed at the building of King Solomon's Temple and in the case of an impostor-or one detected in the attempt wrongfully to obtain the wages due to one of a superior class-to inflict the ancient punishment thereby incurred. This should teach us to avoid the danger of indulging in deception and of attempting fraud-by acting openly and straightforwardly in the face of our fellow-men-so that, with minds conscious of right, we need not fear detection or dread exposure, but be able to walk boldly onwards with consciences void of offence towards God and towards man.

14.- the Equilateral Triangle, as the most perfect of figures, was adopted by all the ancient nations as a symbol of the Deity, and it still retains that allusion as an emblem in Masonry. In Mark Masonry it has peculiar significance as denoting the Master's approval of the work. This emblem should therefore teach us to strive earnestly to perform our duty both to God and man, so that, when called from our labours here, we may be found worthy to receive the approval of the Great Overseer of the Universe.

The cypher depicted before you has generally been credited with a Masonic character and origin, and by many has been supposed to belong more especially to the Mark Degree. It may be used in a variety of combinations and may be advantageously employed as a medium of communication after instruction in its use, which must be orally given.

The square and oblong ashlar and the keystone, occupy prominent positions on the Tracing Board, to recall those lessons which their employment in the ceremony of advancement impressed upon your minds, and which it is hoped have not been effaced therefrom.

The sunbeam striking on the roof of the temple has particular and important significance in this Degree, but the explanation can be given to those only who are admitted to the distinguished position of Master of a Lodge of Mark Master Masons. The pictorial representations in the Tracing Board portray scenes and occurrences associated with the work carried on for the construction of the temple, in the clay grounds between Succoth and Zaradatha, in the Forest of Lebanon, and near the precipitous shores of Joppa. These have already been fully explained in the ceremony of advancement.

The inscription at the head of the Tracing Board, "Lapis reprobatus caput anguli", which signifies "the Stone which was rejected has become the headstone of the corner", keeps forcibly before us the leading truth inculcated in this beautiful Degree-the fallibility of human judgment and the comforting assurance derived from a belief in the existence of a heavenly judge, to whose impartial and, we trust, merciful tribunal our work will have hereafter to be submitted. God seeth not as man seeth; and while in the honest endeavour to frame our conduct by the plans laid down for our guidance, interpreting them to the best of our ability by the imperfect light vouchsafed us, we may be misjudged and misunderstood by our erring fellow-mortals, we may confidently place our reliance there and look for our reward from Him who is as merciful as He is unerring.