

THE SEVEN VIRTUES.

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At the making of a Freemason considerable pains are taken to impress him with two things in particular, which are finally pin-pointed in the all-important Charge after Initiation; there, in its first paragraph, he is told that ours is an ancient and honourable institution and that its basis is the practice of virtue; the term "every moral and social virtue" was probably chosen and has persisted because of its comprehensiveness, but in one way or another most if not all of the virtues of mankind are embraced in the seven specially featured in Freemasonry; indeed, the greatest of them all, Charity, as expounded in the V.S.L. (1 Corinthians 13), is itself almost all-embracing.

The purpose of this Paper is to bring before you a number of literary and other references, and to discuss the Symbolism which at various times has been attached to the Seven Virtues.

THE NUMBER SEVEN: But, first, why Seven? In symbolism that number has always indicated completeness or perfection: for instance, the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences were once supposed to include everything necessary for the completed education of a man of the best class.

Accordingly, teachers of morality long ago classified the chief vices and virtues of humanity as The Seven Deadly Sins and the Seven Virtues; there may have been some difficulty in making the final selection of the Sins, which were Pride, Covetousness, Lust, Anger, Gluttony, Envy and Idleness, but there was none at all in the case of the Virtues. They had been classified for a very long time already, as the Four Cardinal Virtues - Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude and Justice, and those three others, Faith, Hope and Charity, which in the Lecture on the First Tracing Board are called the three principal Moral Virtues; elsewhere they have been variously called the Divine, Spiritual, Evangelical and Theological Virtues.

THE FOUR CARDINAL VIRTUES are in a number of ways a very interesting study; the word "cardinal" signifies something fundamental, having a Latin root, "cardo," a hinge; as a door is supported and swings on its hinges, so a man's character depends upon his having those qualities of mind and spirit which are called the Four Cardinal Virtues, but which we know in everyday life as good judgment and common sense, moderation and self-control, courage and endurance, and honest and sincerity; they are the marks of one who in the words of the Ancient Charge is "a good man and true."

Two centuries or so ago, when the Craft was being brought into its present shape, the Cardinal Virtues were known as such to all educated men, and had been for many centuries. As far as we know they were first associated by the philosophers of Ancient Greece well over 2000 years ago, and they have been handed down by men of learning of all ages, always in a group of Four.

They are not so associated in the V.S.L., but considering how long it is since it was written there is an astonishing reference to them in one of the books of the Apocrypha, the Wisdom of Solomon: "Wisdom teacheth temperance and prudence, justice and fortitude, which are such things as men can have nothing more profitable in life."

In The Middle Ages a French Bishop, Durandus, wrote that "In the Temple of God the four sides, the walls, are the Four Cardinal Virtues, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance and Prudence," a saying which is very much in line with our present symbolism and may have influenced it.

DANTE'S SYMBOLISM (1321 A.D.): But for reasons which will be evident the works of no writer of long ago contain references of such interest in our present study of those of Dante the Italian, held to be one of the six greatest writers of all time. In his masterpiece, the tremendous Allegory we know as "The Vision of Dante," he makes an attack on the Seven Deadly Sins. Its power is matched by the effectiveness and beauty of what he next encounters - the symbols of the Cardinal Virtues.

He describes his escape before dawn from "the deadly gloom" of the infernal regions, which had filled him with grief, and tells us how he turned first to the East (for the sunrise) and then to the right, towards the South Pole, there, he wrote, "I saw four stars ... Heaven of their rays seemed joyous.

Those stars were to Dante at once welcome Stars of Hope for the future and brilliant symbols of the Four Cardinal Virtues; they were those so well known to us here now as the Southern Cross. Much later, his symbolism changes; he meets them face to face in the form of four beautiful virgins, who reverently point out, and lead him to, three other of deeper understanding than themselves - Faith, Hope and Charity; this is the first association of the groups of four and three that I am able to present.

In using virgins as symbols of moral loveliness Dante was following ancient examples; in Greek Mythology the supreme deity, Zeus, had three daughters, goddesses of joy, refinement and gentleness, who were the personification of grace and beauty; it is interesting to note that they were called the Charities; to the Romans they were known as the Gratiae, and to us they are the Three Graces.

FAMOUS PAINTINGS. Another instance of the prominence given to the Four Cardinal Virtues in the Middle Ages came at the end of the period; in 1499 the great artist Perugino was commissioned to decorate vaulted ceiling of the Audience of the Bankers at Perugia, in Central Italy. As a recently obtained set of photographs shows, his magnificent work stands almost unimpaired to this day.

He personified the Virtues in calm, seated figures of beautiful women, and they are delightful examples of symbolism.

La Prudenza holds in her left hand a handsome mediaeval mirror, round the long handle of which is coiled the serpent of wisdom, to which she points with the other hand;

La Temperanza holds two identical finely-shaped ampullae, from one of which she pours a liquid into the other; she is diluting the strong wine drunk only by the temperate;

La Fortezza is a powerful figure wearing a winged helmet of beautiful design; she is clad in mail to the hips and wears heavy armour on breast, shoulders and arms; in her right hand is a formidable mace and at her other side there is a heavy shield;

La Giustizia with her left hand, by the tips of her forefinger and thumb, delicately holds her traditional scales at true balance, intently scrutinizing them with half-closed eyes; in her right hand she holds a fine, very long sword with a blunted tip; it is the sword of mercy.

THE XVIII CENTURY: My next reference is to the work of a great English artist in a period which saw a greatly quickened development in the Craft and a considerable expansion in its use of symbolism - the

last half of the Eighteenth Century. Under the leadership of such famous brethren as Dunckerley, Hutchinson, Preston and Hemming it was changed in fifty to sixty years from a fairly simple institution to the greatest and intellectual System of Morality whose branches have since spread over the four quarters of the globe. THE REYNOLDS WINDOW:

In 1768 the Royal Academy was founded, its first President being the famous painter Sir Joshua Reynolds; from the point of view of this paper his most interesting achievement was the production of what has been called a "remarkable design" for a famous painted window, the great West Window in the Ante-chapel of New College, Oxford.

This is a very large window of twelve lights in two panels; the upper five depict scenes of the Nativity and Adoration, and the lower seven the Seven Virtues, with Charity in the centre; like Perugino's, they are separate figures of graceful women, dressed in classical robes, each in an attitude and with an expression and attributes peculiarly and beautifully symbolic of one of the Virtues; I shall have the pleasure of showing them to you shortly. (Exhibited: illustrations from Ackerman's "Oxford").

I am indebted to the Warden of New College for the information that negotiations with Sir Joshua were begun in 1778; his designs were full sized cartoons, which were transferred to the Window by Mr. Jervais, a glass-painter of London, and the work being completed by 1782.

It is said that though a brilliant and successful artist Sir Joshua was a kindly, modest and gracious man, "marked by nobility of character"; exactly the kind of an who would delight in portraying symbols of the finest qualities of human nature, and would do it with understanding and feeling.

Because of the originality of beauty of the design, the reputation of the artist, and its position in a famous Oxford College, the Reynolds Window must have quickly become known; and before long it was evident that its special symbolism of the Seven Virtues had commended itself to the Fraternity.

As already indicated, there were many changes in the Craft in the last part of the XVIII Century, of which the most important was the raising of the whole tone of the Institution, brought about in two ways. Firstly, it was strengthened by the inclusion of many distinguished men, members of the aristocracy, and finally of Royalty (the two brothers and five sons of King George III were members of the Britanic Lodge of London). Secondly, the convivial and social side was diminished in importance, and the symbolical and ceremonial enhanced; in this process a leading part was taken by Preston and Hutchinson, who revised and expanded the Lectures, the Charges and the Symbolism. When their work was done, and finally revised by Hemming and other in 1813, the Seven Virtues were established in the place they have in our Ritual today.

But in this Paper I am mostly concerned with actual symbols and their use in Masonic Instruction, and as pictorial devices felt to be characteristic of the Craft. Let us therefore now look at the appearance and illustrations of

THE SEVEN VIRTUES OF THE CRAFT. At the end of the Lecture on the first Tracing Board we are told, rather drily, that "Tradition informs us that all these (The Four Cardinal Virtues) were constantly practised by our ancient brethren." But it is hard to find direct evidence that they or the higher Three were specially brought to the notice of the early Speculative Masons, that is, in groups of four and three. I can

bring forward only two pieces of information with a bearing on this point.

The first is that an American writer, Haywood, in his "Symbolical Masonry," says that the Ladder with seven rungs for the Seven Virtues was introduced into the Ritual "it is thought by Martin Clare in 1732" (my italics): and the second is that a well-known engraving of 1735 shows the Master of an English Lodge wearing as collar jewels his Square, a Trowel, and a Miniature Ladder (A.Q.C. XXIII page 126). As the Ladder is symbolical of the practice of virtue it is possible that this is indirect evidence.

However, in the first forerunner of the Charge after Initiation (Smith's Pocket Companion of 1734), the only virtues mentioned are Benevolence and Charity, while Martin Clare's own "Discourse" to Grand Lodge on the Aims of the Order, in 1735, does not refer to any at all.

But two well-known Exposures of 1760 and 1762 show that by that time at least some of the Virtues had a definite place in the teachings of the Craft; their "Entered Apprentice's Lecture" contains the following prayer: "O Lord God, add to our Faith virtue, and to our virtue knowledge, and to knowledge Temperance, and to Temperance, Prudence, and ... to brotherly love Charity."

On 1772 William Preston first published his "Illustrations of Masonry," later editions of which contain the same references to the Cardinal Virtues as appear in the Charge after Initiation in the N.Z. Ritual, and similar, but shorter, explanations of them to those in the Sixth Section of the Emulation Lecture of the First Degree.

I turn now to the interesting subject of Masonic Symbols of the Virtues.

SYMBOLS OF FAITH, HOPE AND CHARITY: The earliest examples I can refer to were produced about 1750 for the Old Dundee Lodge of London, and are illustrated in its well-known History; they were part of the design of a remarkably fine Plate engraved by Benj. Cole as a heading for the Lodge Summons, and have some features which distinguish them from what became almost convention later on. They are figures of handsome women with classical drapings: Faith holds a Torch high above her head with her left hand, and in her right she has a Scroll, beside which a large key is suspended (Faith opens the Door to true wisdom); Hope holds the large anchor usually associated with her, and her right hand points upwards, in this case not very convincingly; and Charity is a Mother with four children, not the three which afterwards became conventional. These are excellent figures, but Faith is the only one which stands comparison with those drawn by Reynolds a number of years later.

A different version is illustrated in A.Q.C. Vol. XXIX, on a printed Handkerchief bearing the date A.D. 1769; it shows Faith looking down at a large Open Book held in her right hand; Hope with her anchor, pointing towards a broad stairway in the centre of the design; while Charity with three children is seated between her companions (suckling her babe as often shown); these figures are beautiful but lack the animation of Sir Joshua's. Still another "Faith" has a lamb at her feet and carries a palm-leaf, a symbol of Victory.

There are numerous examples like these on Masonic material of all kinds, even on Aprons; a curious example of one of these of the year 1800 carries symbols of all Seven Virtues. But right up to that time and even beyond it Faith, Hope and Charity were commonly indicated by the letters F., H., and C. placed on the rungs, generally three, of a plain short ladder.

May I draw your attention to an exhibit; it is a white silk scarf nearly a yard square, a modern reprint of a Masonic Scarf or Shawl which was probably first designed before the Union in 1813; this may be surmised because it shows the Arms of the Atholl Grand Lodge. (Scarf illustrated in Trans. Leicester L. of R. 1933-34).

This scarf is of particular interest to our present discussion because its Symbols of Faith, Hope and Charity are, except for one detail, exact copies of those on the Reynolds Window, though they suffer from reproduction on cloth. I should like you to specially note the animation of these figures and the expressiveness of their attitudes. (Reynolds was famous for his skill with attitudes and draperies): Faith holds her Cross high for all to see and looks and points with conviction towards Heaven; Hope with her Anchor is just starting forward toward something she sees in the distance, with her hands reaching out in desire and expectancy; Charity - but unfortunately the copyist has spoilt this group by leaving out one of the children; in the original this one is a most charming figure of a child about three years old who is running to his mother in delight, while she looks down at him with a beaming smile; three children are clustering round and embracing their mother; all in all it would be hard to find a more moving picture of pure unselfish love, and the happiness it brings, than Reynolds' Charity.

Before I leave this Scarf I should like to point out that there is another Symbol of Hope upon it, a Beehive with a background of spring plants and flowers - in this case a symbol of the hope of resurrection.

SYMBOLS OF THE CARDINAL VIRTUES: The first Craft Symbols of the Cardinal Virtues I can bring to your notice are on the printed linen handkerchief of 1769 already referred to; at the four corners of the design are the now familiar Tassels.

Although the symbols were sometimes changed, as I shall show you, the representations of these Virtues were always put at the four corners, of the Flooring, the Square Pavement, Masonic Charts, and Tracing Boards.

It may be suggested that the Cardinal Virtues were regarded as corner stones upon which the walls were raised by the aid of plumb-lines (you will remember that Durdandus spoke of them in the Middle Ages as the Four Walls of the Temple of God); the Tassels represented the loops of surplus cord which fell to the ground beside the corner-stones.

Other ways of indicting the Cardinal Virtues were by the letters P., T., F., and J. laid on the floor of the Lodge, and by certain pictures we read of in an old Lodge Inventory, such as the item "Four large Cardinal Virtues painted on tin"; and some of the early Tracing Boards and Charts like the one we have here, show us that those pictures were probably conventional figures of women.

This Chart (illustrated in Trans. Leicester L. of R. 1947-48), like the last example, bears the Arms of the Ancients; though dated 1843 it is probably copied from a much earlier original. Its Symbols of Faith, Hope and Charity are of no special interest, but I am pleased to be able to point out that the figures representing the Cardinal Virtues, at the four corners, are almost exact copies of Sir Joshua Reynolds' and have considerable symbolic interest. Prudence is looking very intently into a Mirror; it was an ancient belief that in a mirror one could see both the past and the future. Prudence here is seeking wisdom from the experience of the past and thinking cautiously of the future; Temperance is shown pouring wine from a decorated ewer into a quite small goblet - very carefully; Fortitude has the attitude and

wears the Helmet of a soldier; she is clear-eyed and calm, her right arm swings free and she looks and marches steadily forward; in Reynolds' Window there is a fine touch - the Lion of Danger crouches at her feet in submission; one can imagine that many a faint heart was uplifted by contemplating such a splendid symbol. Justice is a familiar figure, holding up and closely scrutinizing her Scales for the true balance, and at her side hangs the cold naked sword with which she divides right from wrong.

The concluding part of my paper is concerned with Symbols of the Seven Virtues on past and present TRACING BOARDS OF THE FIRST DEGREE. Early in the XIX Century the use of Tracing Boards became general in England, and before long two skilled brethren, first Bowring and later Harris, had arranged and painted the Symbols on them in a much more artistic way than had been done by previous designers.

In the case of the Cardinal Virtues, both artists reverted to what was apparently the original usage, Tassels (the four human figures had never been generally used on Tracing Boards). But in their placing of the symbols of the three higher Virtues there was a definite change, which was initiated by Bowring. The outstanding feature of this design was the great ladder, which became in his hands for the first time very prominent, and the rightfully important symbol it is; he made it very long and very high, diagonally across the centre of the Board; it had up to twenty widely spaced rungs, and showed Faith with her cross seated on the bottom. Hope with her anchor sanding halfway up, and Charity and her children seated at the top, right under the Sun in Splendour; all were artistic figures plainly displayed on the Ladder.

The Harris Tracing Boards are familiar to us all; most Lodges today use more or less exact copies of the designs he produced about 125 years ago. In his First Degree Tracing Board the usual plain builder's ladder became almost a flight of stairs, flooded with light from a blazing Star at the head and, no doubt under instructions from those who commissioned him, he introduced another change which was probably most unwelcome to many brethren - the figures of Faith, Hope and Charity which had been a source of instruction and pleasure for at least three-quarters of a century were replaced on his Ladder by a bare Cross, an Anchor and a Chalice.

Harris' designs were approved by the Emulation Lodge of Improvement, and their widespread though not universal adoption has meant the loss as symbols of the old, beautiful, and I am sure once-cherished figures, which had served the Craft so well. It is possible that they had perforce to be discarded, in the process of give-and-take before the Union in 1813, but then again there may have been two schools of thought as to their value. An edition of Preston's "Illustrations," edited (and embellished) by that unreliable guide the Rev. Dr. Oliver in 1861, has a footnote by him which is evidence to that effect, and what is relative to my subject is worth quoting: "The ritual already referred to contains some good remarks relative to the furniture of a Lodge, which may be usefully inserted in this place; a good Lodge may be well known by its ornaments ... There should be no picture, statue, nor emblem of heathen deities ... the proper images or emblems are to be taken from the Bible, and the Bible only, as it contains the authentic records of ancient Masonry. Paintings of figures, to represent the virtues or properties of the mind, such as Charity, etc., are in bad taste ... A picture of Solomon or Moses would be appropriate."

I do not agree with the opinion of this footnote, there the figures "such as Charity, etc.," were ever in bad taste, and only a few

years earlier the Rev. Dr. Oliver did not either. In 1850 he published his "Symbol of Glory" of which the special feature, illustrate din a Frontispiece, was the Masonic Ladder, complete with the usual womanly figures representing Faith, Hope and Charity; and it could not be said that his description f them lacked one jot of his characteristic exuberance.