

## **The North is Dark** (An age-old Tradition Examined)

It is one of our old-time traditions that the North side of the Lodge Room has always been termed a place of “Darkness”, in imitation of King Solomon’s Temple “of which every Lodge is a representation”

In further explanation, it is stated that the Temple was “situated so far north of the ecliptic that neither the sun nor moon, at meridian height could dart its rays into the north part of the building.”

This explanation goes back at the very least, to a 1762 English Catechism which stated that there were only three gates to King Solomon’s Temple-South, West, and East-but that “at the North there was no Entrance, because the Rays of the Sun never darts from that point.”

Hence our present-day Three Lights, showing the Sun rising in the East, ascending to meridian height in the South, and setting in the West, with no corresponding Light in the North.

But there is evidence from the Bible itself that the North had always been looked upon as a place of dark ness and of desolation, unhallowed and unclean.

Thus we learn from Talmudic sources that Zerubbabel’s Second Temple, which replaced Solomon’s after its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar, had an entrance on the North, only through the “Tadi” gate, “the gate of obscurity or privacy”, “it being used only by those who were ceremonially unclean and by mourners and those under the ban,” as the Jewish Encyclopedia tells us. Hence, perhaps the Traditional feeling that had grown up in England, in much later times, against

being buried in the north side of the church. Even such a prosaic and down-to-earth architectural work as *The Heritage of the Cathedral*, by Sartell Prentice, has occasion to mention in one place “the north side of the church, the side of the cold and the dark where no man would willingly be buried...” And our prolific nineteenth century Masonic writer, Dr. George Oliver, recounts the statement of one commentator who says that

“There still exists among the people of England, a strong prejudice against burials on the north side of a church, which they consider unhallowed ground, and only fit for suicides and un-baptized children.”

This last sentiment appears to have found expression in at least one of our early Masonic documents, the famous Graham MS., of 1726—a sort of combination Catechism and version of the old Charges—where the question is asked and answered:

“How stood your Lodge at your entering—East, West and South—why not North also—in regard we dwell at the north part of the world, and we bury no dead at the north side of our churches so we carry a Vacancy at the north side of our Lodges...”

But the current geographical and Solomonic explanation appears to have soon taken precedence over the Biblical and Talmudic, and so we find the explanation in the 1762 Catechism previously mentioned, and in 1730, the latter of which says:

“Q. Why are there no Lights in the North?”

“A. Because the Sun darts no Rays from thence.”

More realistic Masonic historians, however, have sought for a more factual explanation than the dependence on the legendary origin of our Masonic institution from the time of the building of King Solomon's Temple which is legend that is no longer taken literally, by serious students, as Dr. Mackey pointed out in his History of Freemasonry.

This more factual explanation comes from the practical art of building, with which our operative predecessors were of course primarily concerned. It has accordingly been suggested that, when an edifice was to be erected, a working hut or "lodge" would first be set up, preferably on the side south of the building that was soon to go up, so that it might enjoy the maximum amount of sunlight during the long working day, from sun-up to sun-down.

In this position, it would get sunlight from the East, the South, and the West-following the Sun in its apparent motion-but would be shut off from the North as the southern wall of the edifice rose up.

That this is not entirely an imaginary theory is now brought out by an illustration in an interesting paperback by Jean Gimp0el, translated from the French under the title "the Cathedral Builders." The illustration shows Van Eyck's Saint Barbara, with the explanatory legend: "At the foot of the edifice, the stonecutter's lodge." Here, in fact, we see a lean-to-something like an open-air fruit stand-propped up against the south wall of the church, supported on poles, and completely open to the air and the light on three sides, east, south, and west.

It is of course just completely blanked off by the south wall of the church itself, which is now on the north side of the "Stonecutter's Lodge." The North is dark