

FROM TOOLS TO TEMPLES

by Brother Gerry Hawley

I wish to bring to you today, some thoughts about Masonic working tools, and their speculative role in assisting a Mason to construct his temple of life. The paper in general is based on Canadian Rite Masonry. York Rite Masonry is, however, alluded to as well.

It is evident to an operative mason that skill with, and understanding of, his working tools are an essential component of his ability to exercise his craft.

While ever important, skill and care are even more essential in the building of a temple or cathedral.

In one of Ken Follet's latest novels, "Pillars of the Earth" the plot is centred around an operative mason of the twelfth century. This mason, Tom, who had worked on the building of Exeter Cathedral earlier in his career is found reminiscing that:

"At first he had treated it like any other job. He had been angry and resentful when the master builder had warned him that his work was not quite up to standard: he knew himself to be rather more careful than the average mason. But then he realized that the walls of a cathedral had to be not just good, but perfect. This was because the cathedral was for God, and also because the building was so big that the slightest lean in the walls, the merest variation from the actual true and level, could weaken the structure fatally. Tom's resentment turned to fascination. The combination of a hugely ambitious building with merciless attention to the smallest detail had opened his eyes to the wonder of his craft. He learned from the Exeter Master about the importance of proportion, the symbolism of various numbers, and the almost magical formulas for working out the correct width of a wall or the angle of a step in a spiral staircase. Such things captivated him. He was surprised to learn that many masons found them incomprehensible."

Such skill with, and understanding of, the working tools of a speculative Freemason are equally essential in contemplation of the Masonic lessons inculcated in the lodge, and practised both inside of the lodge, and elsewhere.

The noble lessons of the 24 inch Gauge, Common Gavel, Chisel, Square, Level, Plumbline, Skirret, Pencil, and Compasses, are used to help transform an ordinary man into a Mason. These deserve our repeated consideration and attention as we practice and develop as Masons.

In order to ensure his ability to complete the erection of a magnificent structure based upon a solid foundation, the operative mason must have at his disposal other important tools, some of which have speculative import.

Let me begin by considering both the operative and speculative use of one such tool which you will recognize as no stranger to Freemasonry. On being made a Mason, one is taught that:

"It is customary, at the erection of all stately and superb edifices to lay the foundation stone at the North East corner of the building".

Normally, this cornerstone has engraved or attached, information relating to the date of dedication of the structure, and the names of those closely involved with its design, and erection. In addition, artifacts, symbols, and significant documents are often contained within the stone.

At the laying of the cornerstone, an important tool of the operative mason is used to spread the cement or mortar that binds this stone to others. That implement is, of course, the trowel.

Some time ago, while studying the ceremony pertaining to Installation, I had occasion to recall to my mind the importance of the working tools of the Craft while reading about the various interpretations and applications of these tools by the speculative Mason. For example, identified in the above work is the fact that a Mason raised in the York Rite is instructed that the working tools of a Master Mason are all of the tools of Masonry indiscriminately ... but more especially the trowel.

The use of the trowel by operative masons is well known. The speculative significance of that implement - provides a Freemason a tool to assist him to spread the mortar or cement which binds into a single brotherhood, men of diverse vocation and interest. Yet, having been so bound by brotherly love and affection the body of the Craft takes on the true characteristics of a magnificent edifice - a

temple, combining diverse talents, viewpoints, and contributions into one common structure of form and purpose. In its finished state, the fraternity presents a synergistic conglomerate resulting in a greater good to all, but more especially to the diligent speculative Craftsman whom each of us attempts to emulate, and through such emulation, grow as a man, a Mason, and a positive contributor to society.

From time to time therefore, we should each reflect upon the trowel as the symbolic representation of one of the most important aims of the craft...the cementing of the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of the G.A.O.T.U. Further, let us consider it as one the working tools used as a means to begin building the temple each us strives to complete as we progress along our Masonic pathways. With it we lay the foundation stone and began the commencing of the brotherhood of the craft.

The First Great Pillar

While then the walls of the temple are taking shape let us now turn our attention to a second important component required for the completion of our magnificent edifice.

In addition to the walls, our temple requires further supporting structure in anticipation of the canopy to come. Let us recall to our minds a magnificent passage taken from the lecture on the tracing board. The newly obligated entered apprentice is taught that:

"Our lodges are supported by.....in symmetry and order."

These three great Pillars of W, S, and B must be fashioned by us as we make progress toward the goal of a completed temple.

Let us now consider the first Great Pillar which is Wisdom, Wisdom to contrive.. Wisdom to conduct us in all our undertakings. ... WISDOM ... THE PILLAR OF LIGHT.

What is Wisdom? How does a man and a Mason build this Pillar?

Let us return for a moment to our friends the W.T of an E.A. which are, of course, the 24 inch G., the Common G. and the Chis. Right reason dictates that the first great Pillar, naturally should be associated with the T's of the first D.... but how? What is wisdom?

The following are some thoughts on the nature and application of that divine attribute.

The special character of wisdom among the attainments of the mind is that it something that an individual may grow in, but seemingly not the race.

Wisdom is more frequently and extensively the subject of discussion in the ancient and medieval world than in the modern books. The ancients seem to have not only a greater yearning for wisdom, but also a greater understanding of what wisdom is and how it can be gained. Modern man has been more obsessed with the pursuit of KNOWLEDGE than WISDOM, but knowledge is not wisdom.

Another distinctive mark of wisdom is that it cannot be misused. We do not ordinarily think a man wise unless he acts wisely.

Other forms of learning may separate knowledge from action while wisdom tends to unite them.

In "War and Peace", (Tolstoy - 1865) Pierre learns from 'the Mason' that:

"The highest wisdom is not founded on reason alone, nor on those worldly sciences of physics, chemistry, and the like, into which intellectual knowledge is divided. The highest wisdom is but one science - the science of the whole - the science explaining the whole creation and man's place in it. To receive that science it is necessary to purify and renew one's inner self - and to attain this end we have the light called conscience that God has implanted in our souls."

Wisdom has often been related to light, especially in Freemasonry.

Some Thoughts on Masonic Light- Fiat Lux- John W. Alexander

"The acquisition of light is the highest activity in which a Mason can engage."

"I beg you to observe That the Light of a Master Mason's Lodge is Darkness Visible, serving only to express that gloom which rests upon the prospect of futurity. It is that mysterious veil which the human eye cannot penetrate unless assisted by that light which is from above."

"Let the emblems of mortality which lie before you lead you to contemplate your inevitable destiny and guide your reflections to that most important of all human studies, the knowledge of yourself."

"From a Freemason's point of view, ignorance is a sin."

"Men are said to be in pursuit of knowledge. They are said to search for knowledge. They are said to be on a quest for knowledge. They describe themselves as seekers after knowledge. All these idioms suggest the same thing: that the knowledge already exists but men have not found it yet. No man ever says he has created knowledge, for, of course, he cannot. What he does is to observe certain facts. He then draws conclusions from these facts, tests the conclusions in practice and, when they are proven to be true, he calls the conclusions knowledge. Our ritual tells us that knowledge is obtained by degrees and that wisdom dwells in contemplation.

This tells us straight away that there is a distinction between the two. Of course, we could work that out for ourselves anyway.

After all it was knowledge that gave us the use of tobacco. Given its affects on our hearts and lungs, by no stretch of the imagination could it be cited wisdom. Knowledge taught us to refine iron and then to smelt it to make steel. But steel can be used as readily to make swords as to make ploughshares. And the same principles of aerodynamics that keep a 747 in the air, kept the lancaster bomber there, too. Knowledge is not an unmixed blessing. It blesses or curses us according to how it is used. And the discoverer is not always the eventual user. Moreover, the uses to which his work is put are not always what the discoverer intended. Einstein is reputed to have said that had he known that the Theory of Relativity would have been helpful in making an atomic bomb, he would rather have been a locksmith than a physicist".

Knowledge, you see is only half the story. It is only the awareness that certain facts are true. The other half - the more important half - is the understanding of the implications of that awareness; the understanding of how the data are connected; how the facts relate to one another, how they affect one another and how their application will affect men and their environment. This understanding is what we call wisdom. It can be measured by the use to which knowledge is put, the user showing more or less wisdom according to whether his use of the knowledge helps or harms his fellows.

If this is true of physical knowledge, how much more so is it true of spiritual knowledge or enlightenment. A wise brother describes wisdom in this way: