

## THE WORKING TOOLS

There are three working tools in each of the three degrees, referring to the three phases in man's nature. This emphasis is repeated right throughout our three degrees: three degrees, three principal officers, three movable jewels, three ornaments, three pieces of furniture, three pillars and three ruffians.

Each of the nine tools has a moral significance: the Twenty-four Inch Gauge, the Common Gavel and the Chisel of the First Degree are the tools of preparation; the Square, Level and Plumb Rule of the Second Degree are the tools of proof; the Skirret, Pencil and Compasses of the Third Degree are the tools of plan.

First, the workman, knowing little of the ultimate design, has to learn the use of the tools of preparation which enables him to shape the stone. The skilled craftsman, knowing what is required by the plan, has to test the work, and for this purpose he must have a full knowledge of the tools of proof; the Master has to prepare the plan for the skilled craftsman, and for this purpose he uses the tools of plan.

The apprentice takes the rough stone from the quarry and on it he uses the tools of preparation to achieve the Rough Ashlar. The craftsman takes the Rough Ashlar and under his skilful hand it becomes the Perfect Ashlar and is placed in the building according to the plan of the Master.

Each of us are the living stones, which are to form the Temple not made with hands, and so that the Temple may be perfect, each one of us has to be so, for the Temple will only be as good as the stones that form it. Masonry is more than a ritual; it is a way of living. It offers us a method and a plan, by which we may build a character so strong and true that nothing, not even death, can destroy it. If we act justly, love mercy and walk humbly before God, then we can serenely await the

solemn moment when we must quit this transitory scene with a clear conscience and a trust in the mercy of God.

The Twenty-four Inch Gauge represents the twenty-four hours of the day, part to be spent in prayer to Almighty God, part in labour and refreshment and part in serving a friend or brother in time of need, without detriment to ourselves or connections. This is a reminder to the Initiate that he is mortal, that he has so many years of life, with so many days to each year, and so many hours to each day. It is only the immortals that do not have to concern themselves with time, for to them it no longer exists; for us mortals each day has twenty-four hours. Later we may learn the secrets of immortality, but first we must make full use of our mortality. In other words, time and space are given to us with all their limitations to prepare ourselves for the ampler freedom of after life. Time is but the gateway to eternity, and by learning to use our time, we prepare ourselves for eternity.

The first lesson for the Initiate is time, and how to use it, and that time is divided into three parts: for God, for our neighbour and for ourselves. The first is emphasised throughout our ritual; we put our trust in God, our Lodge opens and closes with prayer. Prayer is the alpha and omega, the beginning, and the end, but we must not stop at prayer, the definite act of homage to the Great Architect, but carry out His will through the whole day.

The second is our duty to our neighbour, and that does not mean to take good care of ourselves and if we have a few crumbs left over to scatter them to the poor. It means that we give and go on giving to our neighbour, but do not make our own family suffer in consequence of that giving. In other words, remember our neighbour, but do not neglect our own family in the process. The words "without detriment to yourself or connections" have been quite a stumbling block, and the cause of deprecation among superficial thinkers. It is, however, only superficial thought that is scandalised. There must be some order in the fulfilment of our obligations, and a man has no right to neglect his family in order to wear a jewel,

even of Masonic charity. And giving does not mean just giving cash out of a large superfluity. There is no real gift without the giver feeling it. There are many different kinds of gifts; some have cash from their pocket, others have advice, encouragement and sympathy from the heart, and others again may provide help in some sort of practical work or service.

Our duty to ourselves has two parts: Work and refreshment. Without work the gifts that we have been given are wasted -- the great gifts of talent of mind and body, which have been entrusted to our keeping. The finest steel will rust and lose its temper if it is not used, and the finest intellect will become dulled, and the finest muscles waste, if neither are put to use as planned by our Maker. Excess never yet spelled efficiency. So, refreshment is enjoyed. Refreshment, like recreation, means nothing if not renewal. The very word "recreation" means creating again; or, in other words, a renewal of our strength and power.

The Gavel, we are told, represents the force of conscience, which, of course, is the voice of our own soul, or as our ritual puts it "the voice of nature" and the "centre from which we cannot err". It is this inner voice that is ever ready to warn us when without it we would err. If we let conscience guide us, and are prompt to heed it, we will find its voice becoming stronger and clearer with every day of our lives; but, if we fail to heed it, failure becomes a habit, and its voice will eventually become so weak that it is barely audible, so that finally there is no warning at all and its owner becomes a really evil person.

Conscience, like the Gavel, will "knock off all superfluous knobs and excrescence's" so that the rough stone of our character will become the Perfect Ashlar fit for the Temple.

The Chisel is the last of the three working tools of the First Degree, and rightly so, because the Chisel should never leave our hand. As our ritual tells us: "the Chisel

points out the advantages of education, by which means alone we are rendered fit members of every civilised society". "Points out the advantages of education" -- and is that not the whole theme of the Second Degree? There we are exhorted to extend our researches into the hidden mysteries of nature and science. "Science" in that use is the ancient word for knowledge, and education is the acquisition of knowledge, the way to which lies up the Winding Staircase. As the workman, with the aid of a chisel gives form and regularity to the shapeless mass of stone, so education by cultivating ideas and polishing rude thoughts transforms the ignorant savage into the civilised being.

The Chisel furthermore demonstrates the advantages of discipline. The mind like the diamond in its original state is unpolished, but by grinding away the external coat we are enabled to discover the latent beauty of the stone. Thus, education discovers the latent beauties of the mind, and draws them forth to range over the field of matter and space in order to display the summit of human knowledge, our duty to God and man.

After drawing the candidate's attention to the Chisel, we then exhort him to make a daily advancement in Masonic knowledge. He is then ready for the Second Degree.

The tools of the Fellowcraft -- the Square, Level and Plumb Rule are amply explained in a previous chapter, so I will here content myself with several additional remarks.

The Square, of course, is one of the most important tools in Freemasonry for, besides being the first working tool in the Second Degree, it is also the Second Great Light.

The true Level is the surface of a fluid at rest, and we shall find the true Freemason when we find a man who has passions and desires like our own, but who is master of his own soul, who can endure the worst calamities of misfortune and not become bitter, and who can meet the greatest good fortune and still keep his feet on the ground; as Rudyard Kipling said:

"And treat those two impostors just the same".

Men differ in nature, heredity, and opportunity, but above all, in the ability to make full use of their talents or to overcome their disabilities. We can all, however, do our best with what means we have, the greater a man's wealth, or the greater his intelligence and ability, then the greater his responsibility. We must work with the full length of our cable tow.

So, Masonry teaches us equality of regard. On the floor of the Lodge all men are equal and brothers - equal in our regard, and brothers in the great brotherhood of man.

The Plumb Rule is the emblem of integrity, and with the man of integrity we can entertain no doubt. We know how he will act, and what he will do, because he stoops to nothing mean or petty, a debt of a few cents is just as sure to be paid as one of a thousand dollars; where his attendance is expected there he will be. The man of integrity is ruled by duty and loyalty and will never take an unfair advantage.

The Plumb Rule consists of a weight hanging freely at the end of a line; the principle that actuates it is the influence of gravity. No matter where it is placed, it always points to the centre of the earth. So it is in the spiritual world, but here it points unerringly to God.

A man of integrity does not envy the wealth, the power, or the intelligence and good fortune of another, nor does he despise those less fortunate than himself. He harbours no avarice, injustice, malice, revenge, nor an envy and contempt of mankind, but holds the scales of justice with equal poise.

In the Third Degree, the Skirret is an implement which acts on a centre pin, whence a line is drawn to mark out the ground for the foundation of the intended structure. Symbolically, the Skirret points out that straight and undeviating line of conduct laid down for our pursuit in the Volume of the Sacred Law; and so, to "square", "level" and "upright" we must add "straight". "Straight" is defined as the shortest distance between two points; and in our dealings with God, our neighbour and ourselves, we find that the shortest path is that which is straight. We can easily be tempted to take an easier path and so forsake the straight, perhaps at first just a little, but that "little" can become a habit. To keep on the straight requires restraint, which is rarely easy.

A criminal usually begins with a small theft or perhaps just a lie, just something small, but it is that "little" that leads a long way round. A lie often requires another, till we find that we have strayed a long way from the truth. As Shakespeare said: "Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practise to deceive."

A cross-examining counsel, however clever and able, is often beaten by the witness who persistently speaks the truth, no matter how simple and unsophisticated the latter may be. The straight path may lead uphill, or it may lead down the valley; it may cross the grass in the meadow, or it may follow that stony path on the side of the hill, where the sharp edges cut our feet and each step is stained with blood; but it will lead the shortest way to the rest that should come to the traveller.

Life does not consist of one moment of impact by one solitary force, it consists of very many moments with the influence of a great number of forces, each one pulling away from the straight and narrow path, but, if our direction is rightly set, our path will be safe. With the Skirret to guide him, the Mason works with a spiritual balance; accidental influences, however powerful, will be overcome and the goal will be reached.

With the Pencil the skilful artist delineates the building in a draft or plan for the instruction and guidance of the workmen. Our building has been delineated in a draft or plan for our instruction and guidance by the Great Architect of the Universe. It is for us to understand what is meant by each detail of the design, so that our life, when considered in the time to come, and in the light of that plan, will be judged by its conformity to that plan.

We all know that in the erection of a building, just how easy it is to misread the plan, and how we need a good light. We have only to seek, and we will find the light that we need. The light of a Master Mason is but darkness visible, that is, ignorance realised, for there is no greater darkness than ignorance not realised.

The Compasses remind us of His unerring and impartial justice, who, having defined for our instruction the limits of good and evil, will reward or punish us as we have obeyed or disregarded His divine commands. They remind us to so limit our desires in every station of life, that, rising to eminence by merit, we may live respected and die regretted.

Dr. Mackey tells us that the Volume of the Sacred Law gives us light on our duty to God, the Square on our duty to our neighbour, and the Compasses on our duty to ourselves, which great duty is that of circumscribing our passions and keeping our desires within bounds.

It is worthy of note that, while the Square is a rigid angle, the Compasses are infinitely adjustable; this surely suggests to us that the circles of our sympathy and understanding can be adjusted as circumstances demand. If the circle is taking in just one other, whose confidence we treasure, we must remember that his secrets we must keep as our own; if our circle is extended further, it will include all the members of the Lodge, and still further it can include all members of the Craft.