

Capitular Masonry

Voice of Masonry and Family Magazine, August 1897 extract from an address by Comp. Henry Branch, at the Centennial Anniversary of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Maryland, at the Masonic Temple in Baltimore, June 24th, 1897.

We try to draw the distinction between Operative and Speculative Masonry, and yet the distinction is simply that which differentiates the stone cutter from the lapidary; the one cuts a stone for a building, the other for a crown; the one regards the building as significant, the other marks the beauty of the gem itself. A Mason is essentially a workman. It is a very inadequate idea of Masonry that it simply opens the eyes of a blind man to see the light of some hidden mystery. The secret of the Lord belongs to them that fear Him.

The Mason quarries out a stone and converts the rough Ashlar to a smooth and polished stone. If this stone represents the individual man then we see in him natural gifts and graces, which, when taken from their environments, throw upon himself the responsibility for such improvement as will subdue his passions and keep his desires within due bounds. He soon learns that "There are others," and fraternity advances him to the stage of builder, while his stone takes its place with others in a Mystical Temple. Such fellowship of the mysteries of faith makes a bond of union that embraces all ages and all nations in all conditions of society.

The building of this temple leads him to contemplate the works of the Great Architect of the Universe, and he soon assumes the attitude of worshipper. While his unhallowed reason may read the inscription on the Temple, "To the Unknown God," yet when he knocks at the door, it is opened by a brother who declares, "Whom therefore you ignorantly worship Him I declare unto you", The All-Seeing Eye of God looks down upon a company of worshippers feeling after God, if haply they may find Him, and their search discovers some wonderful secrets and discloses some of the most beautiful lessons ever revealed to the Craft. The burning bush that is not consumed, the voice of God who is Himself invisible, the Name of God, for the first time uttered in mortal ear, these compel us to put off our shoes from off our feet, as we stand upon the threshold of another world and commune with the Eternal I Am. The serpent-rod, the leprous hand, the bloody water, these convince and assure that a Divine Leader has taken charge of human affairs, and His message is conscience-binding.

The Master Mason is interested in the building of the Temple which King Solomon erected after a pattern revealed from heaven, and learns many useful lessons, while he squares his actions by the square of virtue and morality, and plumbs his conduct uprightly before God and man, and travels upon the level of time to "that undiscovered country, from whose bourne no traveller returns." He studies the various orders of architecture and contrives many useful buildings for his fellow man and for the worship of the great Creator.

He learns the useful arts and sciences, but particularly Geometry, "the first and noblest of sciences, the very basis on which the superstructure of Masonry is erected." But "the Temple of Solomon so spacious and magnificent, and constructed by so many celebrated artists, escaped not the unsparing ravages of barbarous force."

"Of man's first disobedience and the fruit of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste brought death into the world and all our woe, with the loss of Eden."

Of this we have the counterpart in the destruction of the First Temple, and the banishing of God's people to Babylon, where they remained as servants until the reign of Cyrus, King of Persia.

Capitular Masonry opens to our view the story of the restoration, and is so full of thrilling interest and suggestive of profitable instruction that we never weary of the record of exalted patriotism, untiring devotion and sublime heroism, crowned with most glorious rewards.

And while the story as we read it is profoundly interesting, it assumes wonderful importance to realize that the brother is actually rehearsing in his own experience the sublime lesson, and does actually discover among the hidden treasures a copy of the ark, which symbolizes the Divine Presence; the pot of manna, betokening His Providence in meeting our daily wants, and typical of "that spiritual meat," "the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die"; Aaron's rod that budded, blossomed and fruited in a day, not Moses' rod of authority which might bring water out of a rock, but Aaron's rod of grace, which might bring fruit out of the dry, lifeless branch, the human heart, typical of that priestly office which opens a way of access to the throne of grace; and, last of all, the Book of the Law, that full revelation of His will to man, which unfolds to us the unity of the race and the destiny of the soul, but above all discloses to our search the Incommunicable Name of Deity.

The value of these discoveries cannot be overestimated. It is well to note that man's unaided search did not discover them; it was from the vaulted heavens that the eye of God looking down upon His creatures pierced the dark chamber and disclosed these treasures; human reason may search but Divine revelation discovers. The crow may "lift from his mind the heavy weight of passions and prejudices, which encumber his progress toward virtue," the pick may "loosen the hold which long habits of sin and folly have had upon his disposition," and the spade may "remove the rubbish of vice and ignorance, which prevents him from beholding that eternal foundation of truth and wisdom upon which he is to erect the spiritual and moral temple of his second life," but at the last it is the "vertical ray" - the "Heavenly Vision" - that brings to light what the hidden vault concealed.

We are accustomed to hide our treasures in a vault, and the hidden arch is concealed beneath the ground, but our speech betrayeth us, for we speak of the vaulted heavens and the firmament above is as veritable an arch as the crypt below.

In my closing word I shall try, in the light of this suggestion, to raise a Royal Arch before your minds, and so redeem my pledge to speak of Capitular Masonry.

We read of two pillars in the porch of King Solomon's Temple. They stand like two interrogation points to challenge our inquiry and, it may reward our investigation. With their lily work, network and pomegranate, signifying unity, peace and plenty, Masonry has placed upon these two spherical bodies globes celestial and terrestrial, and the problem seemed solved.

I wish to make a suggestion, not by the card, but as from an unlettered workman, whose claim to your indulgence and consideration is based upon the integrity of his purpose and sincerity of his desire to serve those whose kindness has accepted his credentials as a descendant of those ancient brethren whose hands laid the foundation of the first temple. If this stone now presented for your inspection does not seem fit for a place in the beautiful temple you are now engaged in erecting, then throw it over among the rubbish; maybe some day it will be discovered and its exaltation assured. I shall not be surprised if you do not recognize the "Mark" of any of the Craft upon it.

This is my thought: What mean these two pillars? Not useless ornaments simply; not hollow depositories simply. What do they contain? What do they suggest? We may not discover, we may not suggest; but may we not imagine? I see them standing alone, with no lintel across to join their chapter, no arch above to unite their strength. Why not construct an arch, aye a Royal Arch?

These two pillars suggest fellowship, which is the basis of our Fraternity. Capitular Masonry suggests an idea that will unite them as in a Royal Arch.

The name of one is Jachin. Let us translate it as Virtue, for this is the strength of manhood. The other is Boaz, which I translate as Benevolence, for this establishes our claim to manhood, and upon these twin pillars I will raise an arch. I believe, as I understand Masonry, these are its characteristic outward manifestations.

Now upon the broad foundation, which gives strength to all our obligations, lies Faith in God. Let us construct our arch: On the one side, springing from the pillar Jachin or Virtue, let us follow the Sacred Word, and add to faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity, and thus he reaches the fullness of the stature of the perfect man.

These beveled stones reared about the chapter on the pillar of Virtue, will form into an arch approaching that which springs from the other pillar of Boaz, which we call Benevolence. The graces which come from the heart all find expression here, in benefactions to a needy brother, his wife, widow or orphan, and brighten the whole pathway of life, lining every cloud of sorrow with tender sympathy and bridging every gloomy gulf with the rainbow of promise, really rising from Faith to Hope, and finally reaching the highest rung in the theological ladder, which ends in Charity, as did the other arch. As these two arches approach each other, there dawns upon the soul the need of some special gift or grace or virtue; partaking of the nature of the two pillars, in their significant types. It can nowhere be found till the vertical rays of the noonday sun, proceeding from the great white throne, reveal to us a stone, once rejected as unknown or unrecognized, and it is placed in the key of the arch; the stone which the builders rejected has become the head' of the corner.

The strength and courage of the Lion, the patience and submission of the Ox, the soaring devotion and elevation of the Eagle, the intelligence and benevolence of Man - These unite to form the "Perfect Ashlar," which passes the inspection of the Overseers and receives the full wages of faithful labour. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saveth he that receiveth it."

Companions, the century draws to its close. Would you help, aid and assist in this great and glorious work? Then come with us and we will do you good. "Take off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."

"The secret of the Lord belongs to them that fear Him."

No alien hands can place a stone in this wondrous building. Who are you? If you can speak the word aright, with no double tongue nor lispingsh Shibboleth; if with the signet of truth you approach our portals, then you are welcome and shall share in the incense of our devotions and the wages of our Craft and participate in the labours of this building.

If Freemasonry is a discovery and not an invention, then Capitular Masonry is more than a discovery, it is a revelation. Know ye not that your bodies are the Temple of the Holy Ghost?

Submitted by Ex. Comp. Adam Meldrum
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