

THE NORTH EAST CORNER

I have heard it said that no Degree excels the first Degree; and that of the first degree, the N.E. corner lecture is unequalled by any other portion of our finely phrased ceremony. The first degree has all the charm of novelty and surprise. As a rule the uninitiated knows nothing of our Ritual, and is in a state of total darkness as to our order of service. He may have picked up little bits of information from a variety of more or less authentic sources, but these, most probably, have been intermixed with suggestions that the whole ceremony is a species of horseplay in which more or less good natured buffoonery has a conspicuous part. As a consequence, the candidate approaches the business in a kind of spirit of derring do, fortified by the reflection that as many of his friends and acquaintances have survived the ordeal, he may have similar luck.

To a mind thus prepared, or rather unprepared, our ceremonial must come as a sort of spiritual revelation. The candidate finds himself at once in an atmosphere vastly different from anything which he has anticipated. Serious purpose takes the place of clownish antics, and the spirit of the buffoon is completely forgotten in the lofty thoughts of men who invoke the blessing of God upon the work in which they are engaged. And surely, if the entrance of the candidate, the benefit of the Lodge prayer, the solemn vow of fidelity, and the call to his noblest manhood to prove himself worthy of the badge of a Mason, impress the postulant, he must be doubly impressed by the singularly beautiful lecture which is addressed to him as he stands in the N.E. corner, in the shoes of all the millions who have gone before him figuratively, as each one of them in turn had done to represent the stone upon which the whole structure depends for its stability.

By this time it must have been borne in upon him that the society of which he has become a member cherishes noble aims, exists to inculcate lofty thoughts, and, as he knows that the strength of a chain is the strength of its weakest link, so must he recognise that Freemasonry expects everyone of its members to represent a stone perfect in all its parts, and fitted to fill its place in the vast Temple of universal brotherhood which every succeeding generation of Craftsman strives to carry nearer to completion.

In popular parlance the exhortation delivered at the N.E. corner is called the "Charity Charge", and if one considers the older meaning the New Testament meaning of the word the term is singularly appropriate. For Charity meant love towards our fellow man the chief of the Christian graces, and love is the foundation on which every Mason must build if he would be faithful to the divine purpose of the Architect of our mysteries.

"Benevolence" attended by Heaven born of Charity is an Honour to our nation whence it springs, is nourished, and cherished. Happy is he who has sown the seeds of benevolence in his breast: he envieth not his neighbour, he believeth not a tale when told by a slanderer, Malice and revenge having no place in his breast, he forgives the injuries of men. Elsewhere in our ceremony there is evidence that the lecture is not intended wholly to refer to pecuniary assistance. In the final exhortation of the degree there is a reference to the ceremonies which are so amply illustrated in the N.E. corner, namely Benevolence and Charity, which clearly indicates, I think, that the matter is not to be circumscribed by mere money.

The Mason helps out of the kindness of a generous fraternal heart, never forgetting that the poor and distressed recipient is a Brother with a well founded claim to compassionate consideration. He does not parade his Benevolence in the market place, but respecting a Brothers feelings, gives with a secret hand, praying that the world may never learn of what after all, is not the worlds business.

The Charity which is inculcated in the N.E. CORNER is something wider, and deeper, and grander than the casual dispensing of pecuniary help. If we take the other meaning of the word "love towards our fellow men" we see the whole plan of Masonry revealed in a moment, and where, I suggest could the plan be more fittingly unfolded than at the spot where the foundation stone of all stately and superb edifices is laid. The Freemason is engaged in the erection of the most magnificent of all structures _ the Temple of character and ere he is equipped with tools, and invited to take a share in the work it is well that he should know on what foundation he is expected to build . An old book on Freemasonry lays it down that the three principal steps of the ladder that reaches from earth to Heaven are Faith, Hope and Charity of which Charity possesses the highest and most distinguished rank, and the reason for this will be evident, says the author, if we distinctly consider the exclusive properties of these virtues, and thence deduce the incomparable excellence of universal Charity.

Pursuing his plan he argues that faith is a firm sincere assent to the fundamental truths of religion, Hope is an earnest and well assured expectation of escaping threatened dangers, and obtaining promised rewards, while Charity in its greatest latitude, is an ardent love of God, united with an unfeigned affection for all his creatures. The love of God naturally inspires the love of our Brother created by the same architect, formed of the same clay, springing from the same common parent, and cemented by the most indissoluble ties. The love of our Brother is one of the principal conditions of our initiation into God's friendship, who is the father and generous preserver of us all.

But consider Charity in its most extended signification as the pure and unfeigned love of God and man, and the doctrine of Masonry, corroborated by the argument of D.T. Paul, will be fully understood and admitted. Faith he concludes is the base, Hope is the column, and Charity the ornamental capitol which completes the fabric. I have said that "love towards our fellow men" reveals the whole plan of Masonry, and that is why I think Charity may be regarded as the brightest gem in a Mason's Crown. It has been said that love is the food of the soul; Burton describes it as "that Homers golden chain which reaches down from Heaven to earth, by which every creature is annexed and depends upon his creator" and if Burton had been a Mason he would probably have ornamented his metaphor with symbols of the Craft.

Given the will to achieve its end, Freemasonry could become the greatest power in the world for good, banishing strife, and envy, and malice, and a hundred other things that hinder humanity in its progress towards perfection. May not we take from all this that every Lodge should be a shrine at which the faithful Mason may burn tapers to friendship, kindliness, goodwill, and all the other virtues that are comprehended in the phrase "love towards our fellow men".

Within the sanctuary of the Lodge a Brother may find that peace which is denied to him in the outer world. This is finely expressed in a charge of one of the higher degrees. After exhorting the Brother to faithful service, the charge proceeds "While such is your conduct should misfortune assail you, should friends forsake you, should envy traduce your good name and malice persecute you, yet may you have confidence that among Masons you will find friends who will administer relief in your distresses, and comfort in your afflictions".

You may remember what Burns says in one of his early poems, "The heart benevolent and kind ___ The most resembles God." and Masons who work under the all seeing eye of the Great Architect of the Universe, ever striving by thought, and word, and deed, to approximate nearer and nearer to divine goodness, must recognise the truth of the poets words. And in the end Charity is the only thing that counts. Love is the only coin that will be current at the last recognizing when we shall be called to give an account of our stewardship. Wealth, position, earthly power, all will be as dust in the balance. One of the grimmest legends I know is that of Charlemagne who made himself master practically of the whole world of his day. When he died he was buried at Aix la Chapelle, his dead body arrayed in all the robes of Kingly grandeur, was seated on the Imperial Throne. On his knees was placed the Holy Bible, and there he sat in all the awful majesty of death with his dead finger pointing to the line in the Gospel according to St. Mark, "What

shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul."

Brethren, it is possible for the faithful Mason to achieve that which Kings of the earth have failed to accomplish. Each of us may be a little centre radiating the kindly influence of a sincere heart upon those around us, working often if not indeed, always silently with never a thought of recognition, and finding all our satisfaction in the knowledge that we are striving to be faithful to the principles of our Craft.

One of the outstanding monuments of our history is the Temple at Jerusalem. You recall how it rose on Mount Moriah in silence without the sound of metal tool. Are not these silent builders of the House of God symbolical of all the good work of the world? The builders of character are for ever at work. They slumber not nor sleep. But ever their work is done silently. And as the timbers came from Lebanon, the stones from the quarries, and the vessels from Zeredatha so from a thousand sources come the materials out of which character is built. The good we do to others, the influence we exert upon those around us, the friendships we inspire, the wisdom we glean from experience _ all these are gathered by the unseen hand to form the intangible but eternal structure that shall bear witness as to what manner of men we are.

The great principals of love towards our fellow men which is inculcated at the N.E. Corner is emphasized in no unmistakable fashion in the Ancient Charges of Free and Accepted Masons.

These Charges, like Masonry itself, date from time immemorial and treat of the fundamental principles of the Craft. "Masons", say the Charges, "unite with the virtuous of every persuasion in the firm and pleasing bond of fraternal love; they are taught to view the errors of mankind with compassion, and to strive, by the purity of their own conduct, to demonstrate the superior excellence of the faith they may profess".

Thus Masonry is the centre of union between good men and true, and the happy means of conciliating friendship amongst those who must otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance. I cannot but think that if in thought we take our stand at the N.E. Corner from time to time and meditate upon the lecture which is there delivered always, of course, with the wider meaning of Charity in our mind which I have sought to express, we shall get a grander conception of what Freemasonry is, and be inspired to carry out its great principles in all our dealing with mankind. And we should never forget that our duty is not only to those who are members of our Craft. He is a poor Craftsman who is kindly only to those who are conversant with the use and meaning of the Square and Compasses.

Our pilgrimage is always towards light, and if we gather something of the light that is revealed to us we must reflect it upon all who come in contact with us. The Craftsman who sheds the kindly light of a generous heart will, in very truth, build upon the foundation stone which is Charity, prove himself worthy of the name he bears, and it is with some thought such as that _ that I would leave the subject.

In Faith and Hope the world will disagree but all mankind's concern is Charity. And let us be Charitable in all things, ready to render every kind office of mercy that occasion may require.

Let us look with a kindly eye upon a Brothers shortcomings, and let us be ever Charitable in judgement, and slow in condemnation.

It has been well said that there is nothing that is meritorious but virtue and friendship and, indeed, friendship itself is only a part of a virtue. Like rivers, and the strand of the seas, and the air, friendship is common to all the world. Life should be fortified by many friendships, and where, one may reasonably ask, is the spirit more likely to be fostered than in the halls of Masonry? Pure friendship is something which men of an inferior intellect can never taste. It is a thing not to be given lightly, and must rest on mutual goodwill and perfect trust. If we seek to instill something of this spirit into the apprentice as he stands in the N.E. Corner, we cannot fail to impress him with the Majesty and inspiring grandeur of that which we call Freemasonry.

Brethren lets all "Extend the Hand of Masonry".

THE N.E. CORNER.

It is customary at the erection of all large buildings to place the foundation stone at the north-east corner of the intended structure. Actually, this foundation or corner-stone of the building is as important to that building as a keystone to an arch. Its ultimate task is to bind together at that point two walls of the building, and in due time it not only serves as a link or binding post, but also as a foundation and is built upon. The newly admitted E.A. is placed in the north-east corner of the Lodge figuratively to represent that stone, and in the years that come after he will have risen to a position of greater influence in the Craft, and will be responsible for the future success of the Lodge. If he be weak, then the section that he forms in the edifice will be weak also.

In by-gone times it was customary for human beings to be buried alive beneath the corner-stone and in the walls, as an offering or sacrifice to appease the gods. The soul of those who so sacrificed themselves was considered to derive rich reward in the hereafter. It was also regarded as a sacrifice to propitiate Mother Earth to induce her to bear the weight of the building, thereby ensuring the stability of the structure.

Baring-Gould wrote "When the primaeval savage began to build he considered himself engaged on a serious undertaking,. He was disturbing the face of Mother Earth, he was securing to himself in permanency a portion of that surface which had been given by her to all her children in common. Partly with the notion of offering a propitiatory sacrifice to the earth, and partly also with the idea of securing to himself a portion of soil by some sacramental act, the old pagan laid the foundation stone of his house and fortress in blood."

It was even thought at one period that the pinkish colour of old Roman walls was due to the use of blood in constructing them. In [Q.C. Pamphlet No. 1.] "Builders' Rites and Ceremonies: The Folk Lore of Masonry," by that erudite Mason, C. W. Speth, first secretary of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge 2076, will be found many accounts showing how widespread was this sacrificial rite, a rite practised, as he says, "by all men at all times and in all places." In course of time, and in the process of enlightenment as each race became more cultured, human sacrifices were replaced by animal sacrifices, and then by symbolical ceremony or token. To-day it is customary to place coins of the realm beneath the foundation stone of an important building, while

Freemasons perform ceremonies possessing much beautiful symbolism, corn, wine and oil being poured over it.

As Speth wrote in the latter part of the last century, "Our fathers, ages ago, buried a living human sacrifice in the same place to ensure the stability of the structure ; their sons substituted an animal ; their sons again a mere effigy, or other symbol; and we, their children, still immure a substitute, coins bearing the effigy, impressed upon the noblest of metals, the pure red gold, of the one person to whom we are all most loyal, and whom we all most love, our Gracious Queen."

Though connected directly with the building, but not with the corner-stone, it is of interest in passing to note that it was also often customary to have a completion sacrifice. A story or legend told of many sacred edifices recalls how the architect on completion of the work was killed by command of those who ordered it, or alternatively was deprived of his eyesight – the architect being chosen as the victim so that he might become the guardian spirit of his own creation.

Speth, in his "Builders' Rites and Ceremonies," quotes eight instances of the builder or the architect himself being the " Completion Sacrifice," or narrowly escaping that fate. These are the Castle of Henneburg, Remus at the Foundations of Rome, Manoli and his Masons, The Apprentice of Rosslin Castle, The Apprentice of the Abbey of St. Ouen, The Architect of St. Basil, Moscow, King Olaf and Eastern Snare, and the Devil Builder Tales, and lastly Tolleshunt-Knights Church.

In our ceremonies, the E.A. is taught a symbolical lesson regarding the north-east corner of the Lodge, which is figuratively representative of the corner-stone. He can be considered to represent a building stone, to be used in uniting together the walls of the spiritual Temple which the members of Lodge endeavour to form to the glory of the G.A.O.T.U. and the benefit of all mankind. It can also be inferred that he exemplifies the need of divesting oneself of the tendency to yield to the temptations of mammon, in case greed and lust crush down the finer and more aesthetic points of a man's character. In Revelation ii. 17 we read: "To him that overcometh I will give him a White Stone, and upon the stone a new name written which no man knoweth but he that receiveth it."

From the earliest times men have erected stones to represent their gods, or as offerings to their gods. We find that this practice started from single unhewn stones, and progressed to hewn pillars, then these pillars were adorned with sculpture, and as the years went by particular parts of a

building deemed of importance were given special names and we got Corner-stone, Key Stone, Cope Stone, etc.

The Corner-stone which the E.A. represents is generally of cubical shape, its squareness depicting morality, its six sides facing in all directions represent Truth. Its situation in the north-east symbolically between the points of darkness and light, portrays that our newly admitted member has left behind him that period of darkness caused by ignorance, and is passing into the "light" of a new aim and a new world which is now in process of being revealed to him.

Ruskin said: "Fine art is that in which the hand, the head, and the heart go together," and we in Freemasonry make extensive use for symbolic purposes of stones of simple but beautiful form, and deduce therefrom useful lessons in which the hand, the head and the heart are brought into unison to act together. We have our rough and perfect ashlar, our corner-stone, our lodge in the form of an oblong square representing a cubic stone, in the mark a Keystone, and in the R.A. a double cube. Our E.A. learns the first lesson of Masonic line and rule while representing a corner-stone, and be it remembered that the ten Commandments of Jehovah were written upon two Tables of Stone (Exodus xxxii. and xxxiv.).

Our E.A. standing in the north-east corner of the Lodge may be considered to be the corner-stone of Freemasonry; he is from that time onwards a builder with his fellow-members of the Order, but as in course of time his seniors will by the laws of nature "pass on," he ultimately takes their place, becoming not only a builder but one who is subsequently built upon, an important unit contributing to the ultimate strength of the structure.

To each and all in the Craft has been given the sacred task of guarding the bases, of seeing that those whom we permit to follow are worthy apprentices of a Craft of world-wide good repute. Our future living cornerstones must be worthy of those who so ably laid the original foundations, otherwise the walls of Freemasonry will go down despite the living sacrifices that have been made.

Let the wonderful record that has been achieved serve as a reminder to all of us, therefore, to guard our portals with due care.

THE NORTH EAST CORNER

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All Masons should remember when they stood in the northeast corner of the Lodge. At that moment, they first stood as an equal among their peers. No matter if they were rich or poor, prince or pauper, they were on the same step in the same stance as all Masons before them. Here, with body erect, each was, to all outward appearance, a perfect and upright man and Mason. After experiencing that time and place, it is doubtful any Brother will ever forget the charge given, the proper use of the working tools of an Entered Apprentice and, more importantly, the reason why he was placed in this particular part of the Lodge.

The fact that operative Masons start the construction of the edifice at the northeast corner has a meaning to us all. However, there is another, less tangible reason for the placement of an Entered Apprentice in the northeast corner. If we carefully listened to the beautiful Lecture of the Entered Apprentice Degree, we learned what the three greater and lesser Lights of Masonry are, the meaning of the great Light of Masonry, the significance of the working tools, and the fact that Light and wisdom are in the east of the Lodge, whereas ignorance and darkness are in the north.

Throughout the history of mankind, there have been periods called "dark ages", times when people were subjugated, uneducated, uninformed, and kept in a state of fear. Expressed figuratively, they were "in the dark".

Light, in this case, is knowledge, the illumination of the World's meaning. In one Lodge we have two places, each the opposite of the other. The east represents Masonic enlightenment and knowledge; the north symbolizes darkness and ignorance. Significantly, there is no officer of the Lodge in the north, (American Lodges), no one to impart knowledge or offer assistance.

Now we can understand why an Entered Apprentice, who at this time is the weakest link in Masonry, is placed in the north east corner. For it is here he is given two choices of direction to travel. If he decides to go north, that is, should he decide not to continue in his travels in Masonic knowledge, then all he can expect to find will be the making of his own "darkness". He will never know all the Light that can be conferred in the Lodge. If he elects to travel eastward, he journeys toward the enlightenment and wisdom, which can make him the perfect, upright man and Mason, who can stand erect and true before both God and man.