

ACCEPTED MASONS

Bro Joseph Fort Newton

Edited by VWBro F.C.Lomax,

Whatever may be dim in the history of Freemasonry, and in the nature of things much must remain hidden, its symbolism may be traced in unbroken succession through the centuries; and its symbolism is its soul. So much of this is true, that it may almost be said that had the order ceased to exist in the period when it was at its height, its symbolism would have survived and developed, so deeply was it wrought into the mind of mankind.

When, at last, the craft finished its labours and laid down its tools, its symbols, having served the faith of the worker, became a language for the thoughts of the thinker.

Few realise the service of the science of numbers to the faith of man in the morning of the world, when he sought to find some kind of key to the mighty maze of things. Living amidst change and seeming chance, he found in the law of numbers a path by which to escape the awful sense of life as a series of accidents in the hands, of an unpredictable power; and when we think of it, his insight was not invalid.

“All things are in numbers,” said the wise Pythagoras; “the world is a living arithmetic in its development – a realised geometry in its response.” Nature is a realm of numbers; crystals are solid geometry. Music, of all arts the most divine and exalting, moves with measured step, using geometrical figures, and cannot free itself from numbers without dying away into discord.

Surely it is not strange that a science whereby men obtain glimpses of the unity and order of the world should be hallowed among them, imparting its form in their faith. Having revealed so much, mathematics came to wear the mystical meaning in a way quite alien to our un-poetical habit of thinking – faith in our day having be-taken itself to other symbols.

Equally so was it with the art of building – living allegory in which man imitated in miniature the world-temple and sought by every device to discover the secret of its stability. Already we have shown how, from earliest times, the simple symbols of the builder became part of the very life of humanity, giving shape to its thought, its faith, its dream. Hardly a language but bears their impress, as when we speak of a Rude or Polished mind, of an Upright man who is a pillar of society, the level of equality, or the golden Rule by which we Square our actions.

They are so natural, so inevitable and so eloquent, that we use them without knowing it. Sages have been called builders and it was no idle fancy when Plato and Pythagoras used imagery drawn from the art of building to utter their highest thought. Everywhere in literature, philosophy and life is so, and naturally so.

During the Middle Ages, as we know, men revelled in symbolism, often of the most obscure kind and the emblems of Masonry are to be found all through the literature, art and thought of that time. Not only on cathedrals, tombs and monuments, where we should expect to come upon them, but in the designs

And decorations of dwellings, on vases, pottery and trinkets, in the water-marks used by paper-makers and printers and even as initial letters in books – everywhere one finds the old, familiar emblems. Square, Rule, Plum-line, the perfect Ashlar, the two Pillars, the Circle

within the parallel lines, the Point within a Circle, the Compasses, the Winding Staircase, the numbers Three, Five, Seven, Nine, the Double Triangle – these and other such symbols were used alike by Hebrew, Kabbalists and Rosicrucian Mystics. Indeed, so abundant is the evidence – if the matter were in dispute and need proof – especially after the revival of the system in 1249, that a whole book might be filled with it.

For all that, there are those who never weary of trying to find where, in the misty mid-region of conjecture, the Masons got their immemorial emblems. One would think after reading their endless essays, that the symbols of Masonry were loved and preserved by all the world – except by Masons themselves.

Often these writers imply, even if they do not actually assert, that our order begged, borrowed, or cribbed its emblems from Kabbalists or Rosicrucians, whereas the truth is exactly the other way round – those impalpable fraternities, whose vague, fantastic thought was always seeking local habitation and a body, making use of the symbols of Masonry the better to reach the minds of men. Why all this unnecessary mystery – not to say mystification – when the facts are so plain, written in records and carved in stone?

While Kabbalists were contriving their origins of the universe, the Masons went about their work, leaving record of their symbols in deeds, not creeds, albeit holding always to their simple faith and duty. Listen to these lines left on an old brass Square, found in an ancient bridge near Limerick, in Ireland, bearing the date of 1517:

Strive to live with love and care
Upon the Level, by the Square.

Some of our Masonic writers – more than one likes to admit – have erred by confusing Freemasonry with Guild Masonry, to the discredit of the former. Even Dr Oliver once concluded that the secrets of the working Masons of the Middle Ages were none other than the laws of geometry – hence the letter – G; forgetting it would seem, that Geometry had mystical meanings for them, to be long since lost to us.

You might as well say that the philosophy of Pythagoras was repeating the multiplication table!! Albert Pike held that we are “not warranted in assuming that, among Masons generally – in the body of Masonry – the symbolism of Freemasonry is of an earlier date than 1717.” Surely that is to err. If we only had the Mason’s Marks that have come down to us, nothing else would be need to prove it an error.

Of course, for deeper minds all emblems have deeper meanings and there may have been many Masons who did not fathom the symbolism of the order. No more do we; but the symbolism itself, of antiquity, was certainly the common inheritance and treasure of the working Masons of the lodges in England and Scotland before, indeed centuries before the year 1717.