



THE THREE GREAT LIGHTS

The first objects to greet the candidate's unblinded eyes are the Three Great Lights, an appropriate arrangement, for they symbolize his duty to himself, to his neighbor, and to his God. Sending their rays into every nook and cranny of the lodge, they are fit representatives of those high realities of the spirit which are indeed the *Great Lights*, the master lights of all our seeing. In these three symbols, the Holy Bible, the Square, and the Compass, we shall find inspiration, as well as instruction, one as much as the other, and they may be studied in order.

I

Without the open Bible on its altar a lodge can neither receive nor initiate candidates, nor can it transact its own business, for the Book is a part of its indispensable furniture. So much of the Ritual is drawn from it that students have traced to it some seventy-five references, while almost every name found in the work is a Biblical name. The teachings of the Craft are based upon it as a house is built upon the ground, and it is fitting that the candidate should salute it in recognition of this fact. This salutation of the Book was much used by the church of medieval times; from the ecclesiastics the courts derived the custom; and it is probable that early Masons adopted their usage from the

courts. Some, basing their theory on references scattered among the Old Charges, believe that in Operative days the candidate sealed his oath by placing his hands on the open Bible, but of this we cannot be certain. At any rate we do know that the V.S.L. was considered a part of the furniture of the lodge long before the Revival, though it was not made a Great Light until 1760, or thereabouts.

Our Masonic forefathers were led by a wise instinct in this for they could have found no other book or object capable of sending out so many rays of healing and of revelation; at least so we of the western world believe. A library of sixty-six books of the most diverse character, drawn from many peoples and conditions, the Bible is yet one Book, its miscellaneous chapters being linked one to another by a single, pervading spirit, as pearls are strung upon a silver wire. The most recent of its pages are almost two thousand years old, while other portions go back a thousand years beyond, yet is its force unabated, and it seems to speak as though written yesterday. The history of the collecting of its books together is so marvelous that many have deemed it miraculous. That which "drew from out the boundless deep" of racial experiences makes its appeal to men of all races. It has been translated into more than five hundred languages and dialects, and read by men of the most opposite cultures and traditions to whom it seems as if it had been written especially for them. Truly such a literature is inspired if anything can be, and we Masons may well believe it to be the perfect symbol of the mind and will of God. We do not permit ourselves to be "carried to that extreme of fetishistic bibliolatry that has been such a serious obstacle to the spread of knowledge and to the progress of the race and is now just beginning to be set aside by scientific research and sound criticism," yet we may reasonably hold it to be mankind's divinest Book to date. The Bible was not written to be a textbook in history, or science, or philosophy, and as such it should not be judged; it was written to show us what manner of God God is, and what the way of the soul is.

With this, men of all faiths and of little faith may well agree. Goethe confesses that "it is a belief in the Bible, the fruit of deep meditation, which has served me as the guide of my moral and literary life." Huxley can give a similar testimony, agnostic though he is: "Take the Bible as a whole; make the severest deductions which fair criticism can dictate, and there still remains in this old literature a vast residuum of moral beauty and grandeur. By the study of what other book could children be more humanized!" To these ascriptions we may add a tribute spoken in a Masonic Lodge by Brother J. F. Newton:

"My brethren, here is a Book whose scene is the sky and the dirt and all that lies between—a Book that has in it the arch of the heavens, the curve of the

earth, the ebb and flow of the sea, sunrise and sunset, the peaks of mountains and the glint of sunlight on flowing waters, the shadow of forests on the hills, the song of birds and the color of flowers. But its two great characters are God and the Soul, and the story of their life together is its one everlasting romance. It is the most human of books, telling the old forgotten secrets of the heart, its bitter pessimism and its death-defying hope, its pain, its passion, its sin, its sob of grief and its shout of joy—telling all, without malice, in its Grand Style which can do no wrong, while echoing the sweet-toned pathos of the pity and mercy of God. No other book is so honest with us, so mercilessly merciful, so austere and yet so tender, piercing the heart, yet healing the deep wounds of sin and sorrow."

While holding to all this with the tenacity of our minds we must nevertheless remember that to Masonry the Bible itself is a symbol and stands for something larger than itself, even the whole race's "Book of Faith, the will of God as man has learned it in the midst of the years—that perpetual revelation of himself which God is making mankind in every age and every land."

"Slowly the Bible of the race is writ,
and not on paper leaves nor leaves of stone;
each age, each kindred, adds a verse to it,
Texts of despair or hope, or joy or moan.
While swings the sea, while mists the mountain shroud,
While thunder's surges burst on cliffs of cloud,
Still at the prophet's feet the nations sit."

Accordingly, our Craft permits lodges to use as the Great Light the book held sacred by the land in which they may be situated—the Old Testament to the Jews, the Koran to the Mohammedans, the Zend-Avesta to the Parsees, the Bhagavad-Gita and the Vedas in India. Also, we are not asked to accept any given interpretation of the Book, but are left free to fashion our own creed out of its materials, which is a privilege that theologians themselves have always enjoyed.

The members of the Operative Lodges were Trinitarians, as the invocation set at the head of the Old Charges will testify, but at the formation of the first Grand Lodge, the Fraternity ceased to be specifically Christian, though Hutchinson in an early day (see his "Spirit of Masonry," a volume of beautiful spirit and rich insights), and Whympner at a later time ("Religion of Free Masonry") have undertaken to interpret it in the terms of that faith. A Deputy District Grand Master of Burma wrote, in a letter to G. W. Speth: "I have just initiated Moring Ban Ahm, a Burman, who has so far modified his religious belief as to acknowledge the existence of a personal God. The W.M. was a Parsee, one warden a Hindu, or Brahmin, the other an English

Christian, and the deacon a Mohammedan." This is wholly in harmony with the principles of a society that asks of its members only that they hold to that religion in which all men agree, and longs for the time, when, "high above all dogmas that divide, all bigotries that blind, all bitterness that beclouds, will be written the simple words of the one eternal religion—The Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of Man, the Moral Law, the Golden Rule, and the hope of Life Everlasting!"

The Fraternity does not even seek to impose upon us any given conception of the S.G.A.O.T.U., its position being that each must fashion for himself his own conception of Deity. On this Albert Pike has spoken for us all: "To every Mason there is a God—One, Supreme, Infinite in Goodness, in Wisdom, Foresight, Justice and Benevolence; Creator, Disposer and preserver of all things. How, or by what intermediate Powers or Emanations He creates and acts, and in what way He unfolds and manifests Himself, Masonry leaves to Creeds and Religions to inquire."

II

In our Blue Lodge Ritual the square has three distinct and different symbolisms: it serves as an emblem of the W.M., as a working tool of a Fellow Craft, and as the second of the Great Lights. Being concerned with it here only in its last-named capacity, I shall postpone until a future page much that may be said about it, asking the reader, meanwhile, to remember that it is a try-square and not a carpenter's square, as it is often depicted; and that it must not be confused with the square as a four-sided figure of right angles and equal sides, which is a very different symbol.

Until some four hundred years ago all men, save for a few isolated scholars, believed the earth to be an "oblong square." In consequence of this, figures of square-form were generally used as having reference to the earth, or to the earthly; and as the try-square was an instrument used for testing angles, or squareness, it came to serve as a symbol of that which is mundane or human, as opposed to the Divine. But as it was used to prove that angles were right, it received the further significance of true character, of conformity with righteousness, of duty done, etc. The ancient Chinese, to give one example of this, built their temple to the earth in square form, and called a person of rectitude, a "square man." This, I believe, is the meaning of the square when serving as one of the Great Lights; it is the symbol of right character in its human relationships.

III

The compasses are used in the entrance ceremony of the Second Degree, and in another connection in the Hiram Abif drama, but here we are to interpret them as one of the Great Lights, and then in close connection with the exposition of the square as just given. The same crude observations that led the men of antiquity to see the earth as an oblong square caused them also to believe that the heavens were circular. Was not the sky itself a dome? Did not the heavenly bodies move in curved tracks? Were not the sun and the moon discs in shape? Was not an astronomical chart an assemblage of curves and circles? By an inevitable association of ideas the compasses, which were used to test or to draw curves and circles, were made to stand for the heavenly or the divine in man, and this is their meaning still, as they lie on the altar of the lodge.

In the First Degree the candidate is an Apprentice, a representative of crude, natural man, his earthly nature dominating or covering the spiritual; in the Fellowcraft Degree he has advanced halfway, and the nobler elements are struggling for control; when he has become a Master, as symbolized in the Third Degree, the "divine in him has subjugated the human." If you will carefully examine the relative positions of the square and compasses in the various degrees you will find an eloquent hint of this.

Right human conduct, right spiritual aspirations, and the revealed will of God; fitting is it that the lodge place the symbols of these principles at its very centre, for the Mason who walks in their light continually will never wander far from the paths of life

Symbolical Masonry, by H.L. Haywood [1923],