THE CORNERSTONE 1

The cornerstone is the stone which lies at the corner of two walls and forms the corner of the foundation of an edifice. In Masonic buildings it is now always placed in the northeast. As the foundation on which the entire structure is supposed to rest, it is considered by operative Masons as the most important stone in the edifice. It is laid with impressive ceremonies: the assistance of speculative Masons is often invited to give dignity to the occasion.

The symbolism of the cornerstone, when duly laid with Masonic rites, is full of significance, which refers to its form, to its situation, to its performance, and to its consecration.

As to its 'form,' it must be perfectly square on its surfaces, and in its solid contents a cube. The square is a symbol of morality, the cube of firmness and stability. In its 'situation' it lies between north, the place of darkness, and east, the place of light, hence this position symbolizes the Masonic progress from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge.

The 'permanence' and durability of the cornerstone which last long after the building, in whose foundation it was placed, has fallen into decay, reminds the Mason that when he shall have passed away he has within him a sure foundation of eternal life . . . a cornerstone of immortality which must rise triumphant and eternal above death and the grave.

The stone, when deposited in its appropriate place, is carefully examined with the necessary implements of Operative Masonry: the square, level and plumb rule - themselves all symbols in meaning - and it is then declared to be "well formed, truly and trusty." Thus the Mason is taught that his virtues are to be tested by temptation and trial, suffering and adversity, before they can be pronounced by the Master Builder of Souls to be materials "Fitted as living stones, for the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

The symbolic reference to the cornerstone of a material edifice to a Mason, when at his first initiation he commences the moral and intellectual task of erecting a spiritual temple in his heart, is beautifully sustained when we look at all the qualities that are required to constitute a "well tried, true and trusty" cornerstone. The squareness of its surface, emblematic of morality . . . its cubical form, emblematic of stability and firmness of character . . .

and the peculiar finish and fineness of the material, emblematic of virtue and holiness, show that the ceremony of the northeast corner of the Lodge was undoubtedly intended to portray, in the consecrated language of symbols, the necessity of integrity and stability of conduct, of truthfulness and uprightness of character, and of purity and holiness of life, which, just at that and in that place, the candidate is most impressively charged to maintain.

The virtue of charity, so beautifully portrayed in the northeast corner, should be regarded as the ultimate goal of every Mason. Charity, in the full meaning of that word, is the greatest of all virtues and the Mason who is in possession of that virtue may be deemed to have arrived at the summit of Masonry, but the road is a long and hard one, the real lesson of the northeast corner is that the candidate is the representative of a spiritual cornerstone on which he is to erect his future moral and Masonic edifice, "perfect in its parts, and honourable to the Builder."

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