

LECTURE ON THE MARK TRACING BOARD

This Tracing Board portrays the symbolic teachings of the degree and is formulated to show in pictorial form the hidden truths of Mark masonry.

Among the symbols most appropriate for demonstration on a Mark Tracing Board would be the Masons' Marks themselves, those signatures with which our ancient brethren identified their work in stone. By this means they were entitled to receive their wages. In this way they were required to accept responsibility for the work of their hands, be it good or bad, faithful or indifferent. Thereafter and for all time the finished stone became a yardstick by which the worth of the worker could be assessed.

This, the symbolism of the Masons' Marks of those ancient workers in stone is real and vital. It teaches that our every action must bear our mark, that we can never escape responsibility for any single act of omission or commission, and that the mansion of our daily living will stand the storms and stresses of daily life only if our labour has been faithful and true.

But as the capacity of our Tracing Board is limited, a judicious selection of our symbols has been necessary and Masons' Marks, because of the infinite variety, have of necessity been omitted.

Since Masonry is most emphatically a system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols, it is fitting that moral symbols should find their place on our Tracing Board. Those selected are pre-eminently illustrative of the teachings of this special branch of our Ancient Fraternity, and to them we attach our own particular explanations.

Foremost among the symbols of Mark masonry is the Volume of the Sacred Law – the foundation of our whole Masonic system. The Sacred Writings have been preserved for us to govern our faith. Upon them we obligate our candidates. They were given by God as the unerring standard of Truth and Justice, and by their divine precepts we must regulate our lives and actions. The Sacred Volume must ever be the first, the foundation stone, of all Masonry, the guide that directs us to Masonic light. Here is Faith; here is Wisdom; these are the lively oracles of God.

We are led next by the All Seeing Eye, to remember that the Great Overseer is always with us, preserving us in love from all difficulty and danger, and restoring us after the continuing trials of our mortal existence. His ever watchful eye is upon us and our work, exercising an unwearied supervision over the whole of the human race. Thus we must learn to be sincere in our convictions, cautious in our demeanour, charitable to our brethren and gentle and loving to all mankind.

The operative tools of the ancient workers in stone, long since adopted for their speculative symbolism, appear again on our Mark Tracing Board. The workers tools of the Entered Apprentice and Fellowcraft Degrees are illustrated here: the Chisel, symbolising the effect of the working of education upon the human mind, and is thus emblematical of discipline; the Plum Rule is the simple instrument used by operative Masons to try and to adjust uprights when fixing them upon their proper bases, but in Masonry is of a speculative nature. It denotes the necessity of justness and uprightness in life and actions; the Mallet represents closely the lessons of the common Gavel, and traditional history asserts that it was used by Fellowcraft and Master Masons in setting in their places the various stones of the Temple of Solomon, where no sound of metal was allowed. It teaches us how to correct irregularities of temper and to curb ambition, while it depresses the malignity of envy and moderates anger, and the Trowel, sometimes described as an emblem of circumspection, is the tool monarchs themselves are said to accept in exchange for the royal sceptre, when first they become apprentices in our speculative craft. It is also the Working Tool of the experienced Master, reminding us of our duty to spread the cement of affection and kindness that it may unite all good and God-fearing men in a common bond of brotherhood.

Our mode of ascent to the Mansions of Eternal Grace is here depicted by Jacob's ladder, comprised of several staves or rounds, representing the principal three moral virtues – Faith, Hope and Charity; Faith in the Volume of the Sacred Law; Hope in immortality; and Charity towards all men.

The Twenty-Four Inch Gauge is important, being itself divided into three portions of eight, itself the only perfect number for mortals. We should so apportion the day as to distribute our duties to the G.O.O.T.U. –

some portion necessary for sleep, the greater part to labour and some part to the necessary refreshment of the mortal frame. As we have received, so we should freely give. Our labours are not for the immediate gratification of individual ambition, but for the benefit of all our Brethren.

Allied to the Square are the Compasses of the Master mason, a symbol which teaches us to limit our desires whatever our station may be.

The Hour-glass reminds us of the transitory nature of human life, while the Rope and Anchor symbolise the need for that firm and blessed hope which is the sure reward of a well-spent life, and of that Spiritual Rope and Anchor by which we will be safely moored in a peaceful haven, where the wicked cease from troubling and weary are at rest, and where we may hope to be welcomed by that joyful salutation, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of the Lord."

The level is an instrument used by operative Masons to lay levels and prove horizontals. In Freemasonry it is an emblem of that equality which prevails throughout all judicious minds.

The Axe, an ancient symbol of punishment from the earliest times, is peculiarly the property of the Mark Junior Warden. In his hands it teaches that honesty and sincerity should ever be the distinguishing characteristic of a Mark Master Mason.

The Equilateral Triangle has been from time immemorial, the symbol of the Deity. In Mark Masonry it has peculiar significance as denoting the Master's approval of the work, and so directs our thoughts towards eternal and spiritual truths.

The Tracing Board of the Mark Degree, as exhibited in the Lodge, bears upon it what is known as the ordinary Masonic Cypher. This Cypher enables freemasons of this degree to correspond secretly with each other. In times of difficulty and danger, and in an era of comparative ignorance, cypher methods of intercommunication between the learned were absolutely necessary, but the immediately suggestive form was adopted by the Freemasons.

The Cramp attached to the keystone was a tool of our Operative brethren but has important speculative symbolism as an emblem of strength in unity and of the need for all Mark Master masons to stand firm on the principles of Mark masonry.

The Sunbeam, striking down from the Heavens, has special meaning for the Worshipful Mark Master. It lights the dome of the ancient Temple of Solomon, which is shown surrounded by scenes and occurrences associated with its construction – the plain of Jordan; the clay ground between Succoth and Zeredathah; the forest of Lebanon; and the rugged shores of Joppa. These have already been fully explained in the course of this ceremony of advancement.

The three stones are the very core and essence of the symbolism of this degree, and especially remind us of the Moral teachings it contains.

At the head of the Tracing Board appear the Latin words, *Lapis Reprobatus Caput Anguli*. These refer to the words of Psalm 118, *the stone which the builders refused, is become the headstone of the corner*. They forcibly impress upon us some of the leading truths of the degree – the uncertainty of human judgment, and the infallibility and impartiality of our Heavenly Judge. For God seeth not as man seeth, and while we may be misjudged and misunderstood by our fellow mortals we may confidently place our trust in Him who is as merciful as He is unerring.

Finally brethren, ever remember that as Mark Master Mason's our conscience must always be our guide, and we should so make our mark and perform our allotted task to the best of our skill and ability, that our work will prove fair and square and be approved by the Great O.O.T.U. even though it should be heaved among the rubbish here on earth through the ignorance or arrogance of our fellow men.