

A LESSON FOR FREEMASONS

OR, A SERIES OF MORAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE INSTRUMENTS OF MASONRY

From "The Spirit of Masonry" - 1843

The various instruments which we of this profession make use of, are all emblematical or picturesque of the conduct of life we ought to persevere in.

The RULE directs us to observe punctually every gospel duty; to press forward in the right path, neither inclining to the right nor left hand, for the sake of any transient amusement or gratification whatsoever; it forbids us to give into the least inclination or propensity into the curve of life, and reminds us to beware of the least tendency to a circle, either in religion or morals! - not to mind (because they have seldom any other than selfish views) neither outs, or ins in politics; and to have in all our conduct eternity in view.

The LINE should make us pay the strictest attention to that line of duty which has been given us, or rather which was marked out to us, by our great Benefactor and Redeemer. It teaches us to avoid all kinds of double-dealing, both in conversation and actions; it points out the direct but narrow path that leads to a glorious immortality; and that sincerity in our profession will be our only passport thither. This line, like Jacob's ladder, connects heaven and earth together; and, by laying hold of it, we climb up to that place where we shall change this short line of time for the never-ending circle of eternity.

The PLUME-LINE admonishes us to walk erect and upright in our Christian vocation; not to lean to a side, but to hold the scale of justice in equal poise; to observe the just medium between temperance and voluptuousness; to fathom the depth of our limited capacities, and to make our several passions and prejudices of education fall plumb in, or coincide with, our line of duty.

The SQUARE will teach us to square all our actions by this gospel rule and line, and to make our whole conduct harmonise with this most salutary scheme. Our behaviour will be regular and uniform, not aspiring at things above our reach, nor pretending to things above our finite capacities, nor to affect things above what our circumstances can possibly bear. In our expenses, therefore, we shall neither ape those that are placed in a more exalted sphere, nor attend so much to the glitter of gold as to sink beneath our proper station; but we shall observe the golden mean,

"And always to our acres join our sense,
Because 'tis use that sanctifies expense."

The COMPASSES will inform us that we should in every station learn to live within proper bounds, that we may, therefore, be enabled to contribute freely and cheerfully to the relief of the necessities and indigencies of our fellow-creatures. Hence we shall rise to notice, live with honour, and make our exit in humble hopes of compassing what ought to be the main pursuit of the most aspiring genius, a crown of glory.

The LEVEL should advise us that, since we are all descended from the same common stock, partake of the like nature, have the same faith and the same hope through the redemption, which render us naturally upon a level with one another, that we ought not to divest ourselves of the feelings of humanity; and though distinctions necessarily make a subordination among mankind, yet eminence of station should not make us forget that we are men, nor cause us to treat our brethren, because placed on the lowest spoke of the wheel of fortune, with contempt; because a time will come, and the wisest of men know not how soon, when all distinctions, except in

goodness, will cease, and when death - that grand leveler of all human greatness - will bring us to a level at the last. From hence, too, the skeptic, the shallow reasoner, and babbling disputer of this world, may learn to forbear the measuring of infinity by the dull level of his own groveling capacity, and endeavour, by way of atonement for his insults upon every thing that tends to mankind, either good or great, to vindicate the ways of God to man.

From your MALLET and CHISEL, you may likewise know what advantages accrue from a proper education. The human and unpolished mind, like a diamond surrounded with a dense crust, discovers neither its sparkling nor different powers, till the rough external is smoothed off, and beauties, till then unknown, rise full to our view. Education gives, what a chisel does to the stone, not only an external polish and smoothness, but discovers all the inward beauties latent under the roughest surfaces. By education our minds are enlarged, and they not only range through the large fields of matter and space, but also learn with greater perspicuity - what is above all other knowledge - our real duty to God and man.

Your TROWEL will teach you that nothing is united together without proper cement: no strict union, nor external polish can be made without it. And, as the Trowel connects each stone together by a proper disposition of the cement, so charity, that bond of perfection and of all social union (which I earnestly recommend to you all), links separate minds and various interests together; and, like the radii of a circle, that extend from the centre to every part of the circumference, makes each member have a tender regard for the real welfare of the whole community. But as some members will be refractory in every society, your Hammer will likewise teach you how to use becoming discipline and correction towards such like offenders. If they will not submit to rule, you may strike off the excrescences of their swelling pride, till they sink into a modest deportment. Are they irregular in their practices? Your Hammer will instruct you to strike off each irregularity, and fit them to act a decent part on the stage of life. Do any affect things above their stations? Your Hammer will teach you to press them down to their proper level, that they may learn, in the school of discipline, that necessary knowledge - to be courteous.

What the HAMMER is to the workman, that enlightened reason is to the passions in the human mind: it curbs ambition, that aspires to its own and neighbor's hurt: it depresses envy, moderates anger, checks every rising frailty, and encourages every good disposition of the soul; from whence must arise that comely order, that delightful self complacency,

"Which nothing earthly gives or can destroy,
The soul's calm sunshine, and the heart-felt joy."

Thus, from our instruments may we all be instructed to raise a stately fabric of good works, upon the strong foundation of faith, that we may be fitted at last to inhabit that glorious house, not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens!