

**BROTHERS and BUILDERS:
The Basis and Spirit of Freemasonry.
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**CHAPTER III
THE SQUARE**

The Holy Bible lies open upon the Altar of Masonry, and upon the Bible lie the Square and Compasses. They are the three Great Lights of the Lodge, at once its Divine warrant and its chief working tools. They are symbols of Revelation, Righteousness, and Redemption, teaching us that by walking in the light of Truth, and obeying the law of Right, the Divine in man wins victory over the earthly. How to live is the one important matter, and he will seek far without finding a wiser way than that shown us by the Great Lights of the Lodge.

The Square and Compasses are the oldest, the simplest, and the most universal symbols of Masonry. All the world over, whether as a sign on a building, or a badge worn by a Brother, even the profane know them to be emblems of our ancient Craft. Some years ago, when a business firm tried to adopt the Square and Compasses as a trade-mark, the Patent Office refused permission, on the ground, as the decision said, that "there can be no doubt that this device, so commonly worn and employed by Masons, has an established mystic significance, universally recognized as existing; whether comprehended by all or not, is not material to this issue." They belong to us, alike by the associations of history and the tongue of common report.

Nearly everywhere in our Ritual, as in the public mind, the Square and Compasses are seen together. If not interlocked, they are seldom far apart, and the one suggests the other. And that is as it should be, because the things they symbolize are interwoven. In the old days when the earth was thought to be flat and square, the Square was an emblem of the Earth, and later, of the earthly element in man. As the sky is an arc or a circle, the implement which describes a Circle became the symbol of the heavenly, or skyey spirit in man. Thus the tools of the builder became the emblems of the thoughts of the thinker; and nothing in Masonry is more impressive than the slow elevation of the Compasses above the Square in the progress of the degrees. The whole meaning and task of life is there, for such as have eyes to see.

Let us separate the Square from the Compasses and study it alone, the better to see its further meaning and use. There is no need to say that the Square we have in mind is not a Cube, which has four equal sides and angles, deemed by the Greeks a figure of perfection. Nor is it the square of the carpenter, one leg of which is longer than the other, with inches marked for measuring. It is a small, plain Square, unmarked and with legs of equal length, a simple try-square used for testing the accuracy of angles, and the precision with which stones are cut. Since the try-square was used to prove that angles were right, it naturally became an emblem of accuracy, integrity, rightness. As stones are cut to fit into a building, so

our acts and thoughts are built together into a structure of Character, badly or firmly, and must be tested by a moral standard of which the simple try-square is a symbol.

So, among Speculative Masons, the tiny try-square has always been a symbol of morality, of the basic rightness which must be the test of every act and the foundation of character and society. From the beginning of the Revival in 1717 this was made plain in the teaching of Masonry, by the fact that the Holy Bible was placed upon the Altar, along with the Square and Compasses. In one of the earliest catechisms of the Craft, dated 1725, the question is asked: "How many make a Lodge?" The answer is specific and unmistakable: "God and the square, with five or seven right or perfect Masons." God and the Square, Religion and Morality, must be present in every Lodge as its ruling Lights, or it fails of being a just and truly constituted Lodge. In all lands, in all rites where Masonry is true to itself, the Square is a symbol of righteousness, and is applied in the light of faith in God.

God and the Square - it is necessary to keep the two together in our day, because the tendency of the time is to separate them. The idea in vogue to-day is that morality is enough, and that faith in God - if there be a God - may or may not be important. Some very able men of the Craft insist that we make the teaching of Masonry too religious. Whereas, as all history shows, if faith in God grows dim, morality become, a mere custom, if not a cobweb, to be thrown off lightly. It is not rooted in reality, and so lacks authority and sanction. Such an idea, such a spirit - so wide-spread in our time, and finding so many able and plausible advocates - strikes at the foundations, not only of Masonry, but of all ordered and advancing social life. Once let men come to think that morality is a human invention, and not a part of the order of the world, and the moral law will lose both its meaning and its power. Far wiser was the old book entitled All in All and the Same Forever, by John Davies, and dated 1607, though written by a non-Mason, when it read the reality and nature of God in this manner: "Yet I this form of formless Deity drew by the Square and Compasses of our Creed."

For, inevitably, a society without standards will be a society without stability, and it will one day go down. Not only nations, but whole civilizations have perished in the past, for lack of righteousness. History speaks plainly in this matter, and we dare not disregard it. Hence the importance attached to the Square or Virtue, and the reason why Masons call it the great symbol of their Craft. It is a symbol of that moral law upon which human life must rest if it is to stand. A man may build a house in any way he likes, but if he expects it to stand and be his home, he must adjust his structure to the laws and forces that rule in the material realm. Just so, unless we live in obedience to the moral laws which God has written in the order of things, our lives will fall and end in wreck. When a young man forgets the simple Law of the Square, it does not need a prophet to foresee what the result will be. It is like a problem in geometry.

Such has been the meaning of the Square as far back as we can go. Long before our era we find the Square teaching the same lesson which it teaches us to-day. In one of the old books of China, called The Great Learning, which has been dated in

the fifth century before Christ, we read that a man should not do unto others what he would not have them do unto him; and the writer adds, "this is called the principle of acting on the square." There it is, recorded long, long ago. The greatest philosopher has found nothing more profound, and the oldest man in his ripe wisdom has learned nothing more true. Even Jesus only altered it from the negative to the positive form in His Golden Rule. So, everywhere, in our Craft and outside, the Square has taught its simple truth which does not grow old. The Deputy Provincial Grand Master of North and East Yorkshire recovered a very curious relic, in the form of an old brass Square found under the foundation stone of an ancient bridge near Limerick, in 1830. On it was inscribed the date, 1517, and the following words: -

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

How simple and beautiful it is, revealing the oldest wisdom man has learned and the very genius of our Craft. In fact and truth, the Square rules the Mason as well as the Lodge in which he labours. As soon as he enters a Lodge, the candidate walks with square steps round the square pavement of a rectangular Lodge. All during the ceremony his attitude keeps him in mind of the same symbol, as if to fashion his life after its form. When he is brought to light, he beholds the Square upon the Altar, and at the same time sees that it is worn by the Master of the Lodge, as the emblem of his office. In the north-east corner he is shown the perfect Ashlar, and told that it is the type of a finished Mason, who must be a Square-Man in thought and conduct, in word and act. With every art of emphasis the Ritual writes this lesson in our hearts, and if we forget this first truth the Lost Word will remain forever lost.

For Masonry is not simply a Ritual; it is a way of living. It offers us a plan, a method, a faith by which we may build our days and years into a character so strong and true that nothing, not even death, can destroy it. Each of us has in his own heart a little try-square called Conscience, by which to test each thought and deed and word, whether it be true or false. By as much as a man honestly applies that test in his own heart, and in his relations with his fellows, by so much will his life be happy, stable, and true. Long ago the question was asked and answered: "Lord, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart." It is the first obligation of a Mason to be on the Square, in all his duties and dealings with his fellow men, and if he fails there he cannot win anywhere. Let one of our poets sum it all up: -

"It matters not whate'er your lot
Or what your task may be,
One duty there remains for you,
One duty stands for me.
Be you a doctor skilled and wise,
Or do your work for wage,
A laborer upon the street,
An artist on the stage;
One glory still awaits for you,

One honor that is fair,
To have men say as you pass by:
'That fellow's on the square.'

"Ah, here's a phrase that stands for much,
'Tis good old English, too;
It means that men have confidence
In everything you do.
It means that what you have you've earned
And that you've done your best,
And when you go to sleep at night
Untroubled you may rest.
It means that conscience is your guide,
And honor is your care;
There is no greater praise than this:
'That fellow's on the square.'

"And when I die I would not wish
A lengthy epitaph;
I do not want a headstone large,
Carved with fulsome chaff.
Pick out no single deed of mine,
If such a deed there be,
To 'grave upon my monument,
For those who come to see.
Just this one phrase of all I choose,
To show my life was fair:
'Here sleepeth now a fellow who
Was always on the square.' "

CHAPTER IV THE COMPASSES

In our study of the Square we saw that it is nearly always linked with the Compasses, and these old emblems, joined with the Holy Bible, are the Great Lights of the Craft. If the Lodge is an "oblong square" and built upon the Square (as the earth was thought to be in olden time), over it arches the Sky, which is a circle. Thus Earth and Heaven are brought together in the Lodge - the earth where man goes forth to his labor, and the heaven to which he aspires. In other words, the light of Revelation and the law of Nature are like the two points of the Compasses within which our life is set tinder a canopy of Sun and Stars.

No symbolism can be more simple, more profound, more universal, and it becomes more wonderful the longer one ponders it. Indeed, if Masonry is in any sense a religion, it is Universe Religion, in which all men can unite. Its principles are as wide as the world, as high as the sky. Nature and Revelation blend in its teaching; its morality is rooted in the order of the world, and its roof is the blue vault above. The

Lodge, as we are apt to forget, is always open to the sky, whence come those influences which exalt and ennoble the life of man. Symbolically, at least, it has no rafters but the arching heavens to which, as sparks ascending seek the sun, our life and labor tend. Of the heavenly side of Masonry the Compasses are the symbol, and they are perhaps the most spiritual of our working tools.

As has been said, the Square and Compasses are nearly always together, and that is true as far back as we can go. In the sixth book of the philosophy of Mencius, in China, we find these words: "A Master Mason, in teaching Apprentices, makes use of the compasses and the square. Ye who are engaged in the pursuit of wisdom must also make use of the compass and the square," Note the order of the words: the Compass has first place, and it should have to a Master Mason. In the oldest classic of China, The Book of History, dating back two thousand years before our era, we find the Compasses employed without the Square: "Ye officers of the Government, apply the Compasses." Even in that far off time these symbols had the same meaning they have for us to-day, and they seem to have been interpreted in the same way.

While in the order of the Lodge the Square is first, in point of truth it is not the first in order. The Square rests upon the Compasses before the Compasses rest upon the Square. That is to say, just as a perfect square is a figure that can be drawn only within a circle or about a circle, so the earthly life of man moves and is built within the Circle of Divine life and law and love which surrounds, sustains, and explains it. In the Ritual of the Lodge we see man, hoodwinked by the senses, slowly groping his way out of darkness, seeking the light of morality and reason. But he does so by the aid of inspiration from above, else he would live untroubled by a spark. Some deep need, some dim desire brought him to the door of the Lodge, in quest of a better life and a clearer vision. Vague gleams, impulses, intimations reached him in the night of Nature, and he set forth and finding a friendly hand to help knocked at the door of the House of Light.

As an Apprentice a man is, symbolically, in a crude, natural state, his divine life covered and ruled by his earthly nature. As a Fellowcraft he has made one step toward liberty and light, and the nobler elements in him are struggling to rise above and control his lower, lesser nature. In the sublime Degree of a Master Mason - far more sublime than we yet realize - by human love, by the discipline of tragedy, and still more by Divine help the divine in him has subjugated the earthly, and he stands forth strong, free, and fearless, ready to raise stone upon stone until naught is wanting. If we examine with care the relative positions of the Square and Compasses as he advanced through the Degrees, we learn a parable and a prophecy of what the Compasses mean in the life of a Mason.

Here, too, we learn what the old philosopher of China meant when he urged Officers of the Government to "apply the Compasses," since only men who have mastered themselves can really lead or rule others. Let us now study the Compasses apart from the Square, and try to discover what they have to teach us. There is no more practical lesson in Masonry and it behoves us to learn it and lay it to heart. As the light of the Holy Bible reveals our relation and duty to God, and the

Square instructs us in our duties to our Brother and neighbour, so the Compasses teach us the obligation which we owe to ourselves. What that obligation is needs to be made plain: it is the primary, imperative, everyday duty of circumscribing his passions, and keeping his desires within due bounds. As Most Excellent King Solomon said long ago, "better is he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

In short, it is the old triad, without which character loses its symmetry, and life may easily end in chaos and confusion. It has been put in many ways, but never better than in the three great words: self-knowledge, self-reverence, self-control; and we cannot lose any one of the three and keep the other two. To know ourselves, our strength, our weakness, our limitations, is the first principle of wisdom, and a security against many a pitfall and blunder. Lacking such knowledge, or disregarding it, a man goes too far, loses control of himself, and by the very fact loses, in some measure, the self-respect which is the corner stone of a character. If he loses respect for himself, he does not long keep his respect for others, and goes down the road to destruction, like a star out of orbit, or a car into the ditch.

The old Greeks put the same truth into a trinity of maxims: "Know thyself; in nothing too much; think as a mortal" ; and it made them masters of the art of life and the life of art. Hence their wise Doctrine of the Limit, as a basic idea both of life and of thought, and their worship of the God of Bounds, of which the Compasses are a symbol. It is the wonder of our human life that we belong to the limited and to the unlimited. Hemmed in, hedged about, restricted, we long for a liberty without rule or limit. Yet limitless liberty is anarchy and slavery. As in the great word of Burke, "it is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that a man of intemperate passions cannot be free; his passions forge their fetters." Liberty rests upon law. The wise man is he who takes full account of both, who knows how, at all points, to qualify the one by the other, as the Compasses, if he uses them aright, will teach him how to do.

Much of our life is ruled for us whether we will or not. The laws of nature throw about us their restraining bands, and there is no place where their writ does not run. The laws of the land make us aware that our liberty is limited by the equal rights and liberties of others. Our neighbour, too, if we fail to act toward him squarely may be trusted to look after his own rights. Custom, habit, and the pressure of public opinion are impalpable restraining forces which we dare not altogether defy. These are so many roads from which our passions and appetites stray at our peril. But there are other regions of life where personality has free play, and they are the places where most of our joy and sorrow lie. It is in the realm of desire, emotion, motive, in the inner life where we are freest and most alone, that we need a wise and faithful use of the Compasses.

How to use the Compasses is one of the finest of all arts, asking for the highest skill of a Master Mason. If he is properly instructed, he will rest one point on the innermost centre of his being, and with the other draw a circle beyond which he will not go, until he is ready and able to go farther. Against the littleness of his knowledge he will set the depth of his desire to know, against the brevity of his

earthly life the reach of his spiritual hope. Within a wise limit he will live and labour and grow, and when he reaches the outer rim of the circle he will draw another, and attain to a full-orbed life, balanced, beautiful, and finely poised. No wise man dare forget the maxim, "In nothing too much," for there are situations where a word too much, a step too far, means disaster. If he has a quick tongue, a hot temper, a dark mood, he will apply the Compasses, shut his weakness within the circle of his strength, and control it.

Strangely enough, even a virtue, if unrestrained and left to itself, may actually become a vice. Praise, if pushed too far, becomes flattery. Love often ends in a soft sentimentalism, flabby and foolish. Faith, if carried to the extreme by the will to believe, ends in over-belief and superstition. It is the Compasses that help us to keep our balance, in obedience to the other Greek maxim: "Think as a mortal" -- that is, remember the limits of human thought. An old mystic said that God is a circle whose centre is everywhere, and its circumference nowhere. But such an idea is all a blur. Our minds can neither grasp nor hold it. Even in our thought about God we must draw a circle enclosing so much of His nature as we can grasp and realize, enlarging the circle as our experience and thought and vision expand. Many a man loses all truth in his impatient effort to reach final truth. It is the man who fancies that he has found the only truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and who seeks to impose his dogma upon others, who becomes the bigot, the fanatic, the persecutor.

Here, too, we must apply the Compasses, if we would have our faith fulfil itself in fellowship. Now we know in part - a small part, it may be, but it is real as far as it goes - though it be as one who sees in a glass darkly. The promise is that if we are worthy and well qualified, we shall see God face to face and know ever as we are known. But God is so great, so far beyond my mind and yours, that if we are to know Him at all truly, we must know Him together, in fellowship and fraternity. And so the Poet-Mason was right when he wrote: -

" He drew a circle that shut me out,
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout;
But love and I had the wit to win,
We drew a circle that took him in."

CHAPTER V. THE LEVEL AND PLUMB

Like the Square and the Compasses, the Level and the Plumb are nearly always united in our Ritual. They really belong together, as much in moral teaching as in practical building. The one is used to lay horizontals, the other to try perpendiculars, and their use suggests their symbolism. By reason of their use, both are special working tools of the Fellowcraft, along with the Square; and they are also worn as jewels by two of the principal officers of the Lodge.

Among the Craft Masons of olden time the actual work of building was done by Fellowcrafts, using materials gathered and rough hewn by Apprentices, all working under the guidance of the Master. In our symbolism, as the Apprentice is youth, so the Fellowcraft is manhood, the time when the actual work of life must be done on the Level, by the Plumb and Square. Next to the Square and Compasses, the Level and Plumb are among the noblest and simplest symbols of the Craft, and their meaning is so plain that it hardly needs to be pointed out. Yet they are so important, in use and meaning, that they might almost be numbered among the Lesser Lights of the Lodge.

I.

The Level, so the newly made Mason is taught, is for the purpose of proving horizontals. An English writer finds a lesson in the structure of the Level, in the fact that we know that a surface is level when the fluid is poised and at rest. >From the use of the Level he bids us seek to attain a peaceful, balanced poise of mind, undisturbed by the passions which upset and sway us one way or the other. It is a counsel of perfection, he admits, but he insists that one of the best services of Masonry is to keep before us high ideals, and, what is more, a constantly receding ideal, otherwise we should tire of it.

Of course, the great meaning of the Level is that it teaches equality, and that is a truth that needs to be carefully understood. There is no little confusion of mind about it. Our Declaration of American Independence tells us that all men are "created equal," but not many have tried to think out what the words really mean. With most of us it is a vague sentiment, a glittering generality born of the fact that all are made of the same dust, are sharers of the common human lot, moved by the same great faith and fears, hopes and loves - walking on the Level of time until Death, by its grim democracy, erases all distinctions and reduces all to the same level.

Anyone who faces the facts knows well enough that all men are not equal, either by nature or by grace. Our humanity resembles the surface of the natural world in its hills and valleys. Men are very unequal in physical power, in mental ability, in moral quality. No two men are equal; no two are alike. One man towers above his fellows, as a mountain above the hills. Some can do what others can never do. Some have five talents, some two, and some but one. A genius can do with effortless ease what it is futile for others to attempt, and a poet may be unequal to a hod-carrier in strength and sagacity. When there is inequality of gift it is idle to talk of equality of opportunity, no matter how fine the phrase may sound. It does not exist.

By no glib theory can humanity be reduced to a dead level. The iron wrinkles of fact are stubborn realities. Manifestly it is better to have it so, because it would make a dull world if all men were equal in a literal sense. As it is, wherein one lacks another excels, and men are drawn together by the fact that they are unequal and unlike. The world has different tasks demanding different powers, brains to devise, seers to see, hands to execute, prophets to lead. We need poets to inspire, scientists to teach, pioneers to blaze the path into new lands. No doubt this was what Goethe

meant when he said that it takes all men to make one man, and the work of each is the glory of all.

What, then, is the equality of which the Level is the symbol ? Clearly it is not identity or even similarity of gift and endowment. No, it is something better; it is the equal right of each man to the full use and development of such power as he has, whatever it may be, unhindered by injustice or oppression. As our Declaration of Independence puts it, every man has an equal and inalienable right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," with due regard for the rights of others in the same quest. Or, as a famous slogan summed it up: "Equal rights for all; special privileges to none!" That is to say, before the law every man has an equal right to equal justice, as before God, in whose presence all men are one in their littleness, each receives equally and impartially the blessing of the Eternal Love, even as the sun shines and the rain falls on all with equal benediction.

Albert Pike, and with him many others, have gone so far as to say that Masonry was the first apostle of equality in the true sense. One thing we do know: Freemasonry presided over the birth of our Republic, and by the skill of its leaders wrote its basic truth, of which the Level is the symbol, into the organic law of this land. The War for Independence, and the fight for constitutional liberty, might have had another issue but for the fact that our leaders were held together by a mystic tie of obligation, vowed to the service of the rights of man. Even Thomas Paine, who was not a Mason, wrote an essay in honour of an Order which stood for government without tyranny and religion without superstition - two principles which belong together, like the Level and the Plumb. Thus, by all that is sacred both in our Country and our Craft, we are pledged to guard, defend, and practice the truth taught by the Level.

But it is in the free and friendly air of a Lodge of Masons, about an altar of obligation and prayer, that the principle of equality finds its most perfect and beautiful expression. There, upon the Level, the symbol of equality, rich and poor, high and low, prince and plain citizen - men of diverse creeds, parties, interests, and occupations - meet in mutual respect and real regard, forgetting all differences of rank and station, and united for the highest good of all. "We meet upon the Level and part upon the Square"; titles, ranks, riches, do not pass the Inner Guard; and the humblest brother is held in sacred regard, equally with the brother who has attained the highest round of the wheel of fortune.

Every man in the Lodge is equally concerned in the building of the Temple, and each has his work to do. Because the task demands different gifts and powers, all are equally necessary to the work, the architect who draws the plans, the Apprentice who carries stones or shapes them with chisel and gavel, the Fellowcraft who polishes and deposits them in the wall, and the officers who marshal the workmen, guide their labor, and pay their wages. Every one is equal to every other so long as he does good work, true work, square work. None but is necessary to the erection of the edifice; none but receives the honour of the Craft; and all

together know the joy of seeing the Temple slowly rising in the midst of their labors. Thus Masonry lifts men to a high level, making each a fellow-worker in a great enterprise, and if it is the best brotherhood it is because it is a brotherhood of the best.

II.

The Plumb is a symbol so simple that it needs no exposition. As the Level teaches unity in diversity and equality in difference, so the Plumb is a symbol of rectitude of conduct, integrity of life, and that uprightness of moral character which makes a good and just man. In the art of building accuracy is integrity, and if a wall be not exactly perpendicular, as tested by the Plumb-line, it is weak and may fall, or else endanger the strength and stability of the whole. Just so, though we meet upon the Level, we must each build an upright character, by the test of the Plumb, or we weaken the Fraternity we seek to serve and imperil its strength and standing in the community.

As a workman dare not deviate by the breadth of a hair to the right or to the left if his wall is to be strong and his arch stable, so Masons must walk erect and live upright lives. What is meant by an upright life each of us knows, but it has never been better described than in the 15th Psalm, which may be called the religion of a gentleman and the design upon the Trestleboard of every Mason: -

"Lord, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in Thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. In whose eyes a vile person is condemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not. He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved."

What is true of a man is equally true of a nation. The strength of a nation is its integrity, and no nation is stronger than the moral quality of the men who are citizens. Always it comes back at last to the individual, who is a living stone in the wall of society and the state, making it strong or weak. By every act of injustice, by every lack of integrity, we weaken society and imperil the security and sanctity of the common life. By every noble act we make all sacred things more sacred and secure for ourselves and for those who come after us. The prophet Amos has a thrilling passage in which he lets us see how God tested the people which were of old by the Plumb-line; and by the same test we are tried :-

"Thus He showed me: and, behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by plumb-line, with a plumb-line in His hand. And the Lord said unto me, 'Amos, what seest thou?' And I said, 'A plumb-line.' Then said the Lord, 'Behold, I will set a plumb-line in the midst of my people of Israel: I will not again pass them by any more.'"