

BLUE-PRINTS FOR BUILDERS

Bro. J. Gordon Jones

There are many different figures of speech by which life may be described -- as a battle which every man must fight, as a journey which every man must take, as a school in which every man is a learner, as a building which every man must erect. Masonry, by reason of its name emphasizes the fact that every man is a builder. At the centre of every Lodge, upon its Altar, there may be seen the three Great Lights of Masonry -- the Holy Bible, the Square and the Compasses. The Compasses enable a builder to lay out the ground-plan of his building; the Square enables him to erect the uprights of his structure; the Bible furnishes him with the blue-prints of the Temple he hopes to construct. In some respects, the Bible should be regarded as a Book about builders. It tells about a Holy Race whose builder was Abraham, and a Holy Law whose builder was Moses, and a Holy Temple whose builder was Solomon, and a Holy Church whose builder is Christ, and a Holy Communion -- the Kingdom of God -- whose builders are the apostles, the evangelists and the missionaries, and a Holy city, with gates of pearl and streets of gold, whose builder and maker is God. All of these pre-figure or fore-shadow the modern builder about whom Oliver Wendell Holmes writes, in his poem, "The Chambered Nautilus."

"Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul
As the swift seasons roll!
Leave they low-vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast
Till thou at length art free
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea!

Amongst the builders of the Bible an honoured place must be accorded a man named Nehemiah. In the halls of fame of the Jewish people, there is no name which stands higher or shines brighter than his. He is blood-brother to some of the best amongst the great and some of the greatest amongst the good: Spinoza, the philosopher, Rothschild, the financier, Mendelssohn, the musician, Disraeli, the statesman, Albert Einstein, the mathematician, Chaim Weizman, the scientist, and Jonas Salk, the physician. Nor should we overlook the names of religious leaders such as David, the Psalmist, Isaiah, the prophet and Paul the missionary. too often we say, by our attitudes if not by our words, "How odd of God, to choose the Jews." To which a Jew has replied, "Oh no it's not; God knows what's what." God not only knows "what's what" but who's who." That is why under God, the Great Architect of the Universe, Nehemiah was the right man, in the right place, at the right time. Neither prophet nor priest, he made his mark as a layman, the kind of person of whom it may be said:

"And moving up from higher to higher,
Becomes on Fortune's crowning slope
The pillar of a people's hope,
The center of a world's desire."

Nehemiah lived at a time of national distress in Palestine. His country, like South Vietnam in our day, had become a battle-ground of world forces too big to be withstood and too strong to be overcome. It was an age of volcanic upheaval; political forces of seismic proportions were shaking the nation to its very foundations. The Four Horse of the Apocalypse -- the conqueror on the white horse, the warrior on the red horse, the destroyer on the black horse, the killer on the pale horse -- these four were testing their weapons and manoeuvring for positions on the plains of Palestine. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, with his steam-roller tactics, had defeated the armies of Judah, had broken down the walls of Jerusalem, and had destroyed the Temple of God. Such was the situation when Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem to lead in the work of reconstruction. The City of Jerusalem -- God's holy city -- must be rebuilt. The Temple of the Lord -- God's holy place -- must be repaired. The citizens of Judah -- God's holy people -- must be restored. To this task Nehemiah gave his strength, seeming to say as did Rupert Brooke, "Now God be thanked who has matched us with his hour." His call to the man of his day was, "Come and let us build up the walls of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach." There were four things which distinguished this ancient builder, four things which are needed by every builder today. They are a plan of action, a philosophy of life, a programme of work and a passion of soul.

Nehemiah's plan of action was to lift the morale of his people. As their leader, Nehemiah brought to his task neither men, nor material, nor money. His contribution was in the realm of the spirit; it was encouragement and enthusiasm. Do you know the meaning of the word encouragement? It comes from two Latin words -- "en" meaning "in" and "corps" meaning "heart"; encouragement means to put heart into a person. Do you recall the meaning of the word enthusiasm? It is derived from two Greek words, "en" meaning "in" and "theos" meaning "God"; enthusiasm means to have God in your life, giving you renewal, release and revitalization. In the work of building, men do not live by bread alone but by such soul-stirring, heart-warming words as faith, hope and love, which come from the mouth of God. In these days, too many people are suffering from what may be called "psycho-sclerosis." Do you know what sclerosis of the liver is? It is hardening of the liver. And, do you know what arterio-sclerosis is? It is hardening of the arteries. Well, psycho-sclerosis is hardening of the mind, and of the thoughts, and of the feelings. The very best cure for psycho-sclerosis is encouragement and enthusiasm; they cause you to "come alive" to your finger tips. They give you inward resources of "pep", and "punch" and spiritual power.

One of the most inspiring buildings ever erected by Masons of medieval times is Milan Cathedral in northern Italy. It has hundreds of spires and more than a thousand statues on its roof-top. The whole edifice, carved out of marble, with the great Alpine peaks in the background, gives one the impression that the builders have just broken off one vast piece of marble from a shoulder of the Alps and have carved a cathedral out of it. There are few things in the world more glorious than the "frozen music" of Milan Cathedral, and few things about Milan Cathedral more impressive than the kaleidoscopic colouring of its stained glass windows. The Cathedral was many years in building; after the foundations were laid, one by one the walls were erected, and bit by bit the buttresses were put into place. At that time an

old workman was seen in the vicinity of the Cathedral, holding in his hand small bits of coloured glass. He would lay them in patterns on the roadways near the Cathedral. He would compare their colours with the flowers in the near-by gardens. He would hold up pieces of glass in the sunlight to let the sun's rays shine through them. He would walk around and round the Cathedral, taking up one position after another, and continuing to peer through his bits of coloured glass. Some people said, "He's a madman!" One day, however, he disappeared and it was many months before "the madman" was seen again. This time he came with great carts drawn by big Italian horses, and containing many sections of stained glass windows, as well as piles of soft pliable, lead stripping. He began putting sections of glass together and binding them with strips of lead. After months of work the windows were all in their place. There were windows which faced the east, to catch the first rays of the morning sun, windows which faced the south so that at high noon the sunlight from those windows would fall directly upon the altar. There were windows facing the west, which caught up the rays of the setting sun and transformed them into a thousand shades and colourings. There were images of the apostles and prophets and the angels of heaven. Out-towering them all, there was a vast representation of Christ Himself. All of this beauty in glass is the triumph of an old workman, whom some people considered mad, who took thousands of pieces of glass, and bound them together with the magic cement of his zest and his zeal. Milan is a constant reminder of the truthfulness of Emerson's saying "Every great and commanding moment in the annals of the world is the triumph of some enthusiasm."

Having looked at Nehemiah's plan of action, let us now examine his philosophy of life. It was his purpose to show his workers the larger significance of what they were doing. They were laying bricks; they were repairing the walls; they were rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem, however, is something more than a mark on a map of Palestine; it is a place-name in the geography of the soul. Jerusalem is the City of David, the place where David sang, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in." (Psalm 24:9). Jerusalem is the home of Isaiah, the prophet who preached and promised that, "The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." (Isaiah 35:10). Jerusalem is the City of Christ, the Master Builder, who said, "On this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matt. 16:18). Shakespeare, in his play, "As You Like It," speaks about finding "tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones and good in everything." How true this is of Jerusalem! If her trees had tongues, they would speak of Christ, the Master-workman, who was crucified on a tree outside the city's walls. If her brooks were books, they would tell of a blind man who received his sight at the Pool of Siloam when Christ, the Master-healer, happened to pass that way. If her stones were sermons, they would preach of Christ the Master-teacher who, from the Mount of Olives, looked down upon Jerusalem's gates and walls, and said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem -- how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings and ye would not!" (Matt. 23:37). Such was the city where Nehemiah was teaching the workmen to see the larger significance of that they were doing. In the course of the centuries this city's influence has reached out to every land, and has brought blessings to many people.

Always it is the same -- builders must see that they are doing something more significant than laying bricks or setting stones. Every visitor to England goes to see London's greatest church St. Paul's. The present building was erected in the reign of Charles the Second. To Christopher Wren was assigned the task of repairing the damages caused by the Great Fire of London. While standing amid the ruins of the old building, he asked a workman to bring a stone with which to mark the center of the new Cathedral. A fragment of a gravestone was brought, and on it was written one word -- "Resurgam", which means "I will rise again." Inside the Cathedral you may see the tomb of Sir Christopher Wren, with its striking epitaph, "Reader, if thou seekest his monument, look about you." Let us follow this suggestion by climbing to the great gallery beneath the golden cross. Look out, and in the distance you will see evidence of Sir Christopher Wren's rare skill in the palaces of Hampton Court and Kensington, while closer in are Temple Bar, the Royal Exchange and the Great Monument. Not far away is Seething Lane where Samuel Pepys wrote his diary, the theatre where Shakespeare presented some of his greatest dramas, the house where Wilberforce planned that legislation which "prepared the way for the abolition of slavery in every colony of the Empire," and the house where John Milton, who spoke of England as a "noble nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep and shaking her invincible locks." In the midst of all this one can see Sir Christopher Wren's churches, more than fifty of them, with their tall stately spires, lifting men's thoughts above the noise and confusion of London's streets, and pointing them upward to God. Not a little of London's greatness is due to Sir Christopher Wren, who built better than he knew.

Always, when we build for the future, we build better than we know. Some like the architects, build with bricks and stone. Others, like the artists, build with paints and canvasses; writers build with pen and paper. A few, like poets, build with ideas and ideals. A scientist, like George Washington Carver, studied the values of commonplace things like peanuts and sweet potatoes, until, through his researches, he did more for the rehabilitation of agriculture in the southern United States, than any other person of his generation. A printer, like Robert Raikes, began to "botanize" amongst the ragged children on the streets of Gloucester. He organized them into schools which met on Sundays. The idea was contagious. Before long, Sunday Schools for the teaching of the Bible were organized in almost every country under heaven. A clerk named George Williams, went to London in 1841 to work in a draper's shop. He discovered thousands of young men like himself, living under difficult or impossible conditions. On Jun 6, 1844, twelve of these young men met in his bedroom -- three Anglicans, three Congregationalists, three Methodists and three Baptists -- where they organized themselves into a Young Men's Christian Association. When Sir George Williams died in 1905, there were Y.M.C.A.'s in forty-five different countries with a membership of hundreds of thousands. All of these, and others whose names are familiar to us all, builded better than they knew. Of them it can be said, "Their echoes roll from soul to soul, and grow forever and forever."

Next for our consideration is Nehemiah's programme of work, which was to unite the militant and constructive virtues. His "Orders of the Day" were very clear about this point. Each worker's equipment consisted of a sword and a trowel – a sword for driving back their enemies and a trowel for building up the wall. "With one hand let him labour at his work, and with the other, let him hold his weapon." (Neh. 4:17). Here then was the original "Home Guard", for every man in Jerusalem played a double role; he was both a warrior and a worker. Each was responsible for that portion of the wall which was "over against his house." (Neh. 7:3).

For those men who were defending Jerusalem, the sword was the symbol of their warfare. In carrying out their programme of work, Nehemiah's men had to face some well organized opposition. Chief amongst their enemies were Sanballat, the Horonite, Tobiah, the Ammonite, and Geshem, the Arabian. This was an "unholy alliance" if ever there was one. Sanballat was the symbol of cynicism and corruption. Tobiah was a double-dealer and a destroyer of truth. Geshem was one of the most subtle and scheming leaders the Arabians ever had. These rascals were familiar with every weapon in the arsenal of Satan. They used ridicule -- What do these feeble Jews think they are doing? (Neh. 4:2). they used mockery -- Even a fox could push over their wall. (Neh. 4:3). They used calumny -- These Jews must be planning a rebellion against the king. (Neh 2:19). "Do not be afraid of them", said Nehemiah, "Remember your vows of allegiance." similarly, every Mason is a warrior; like the tyler of our lodges who guards the door ways of our meeting places, the true Mason stands on guard at the gate ways of our society. Like Robert, the Bruce, of Scotland, or Joan of Arc in France, or William Tell, in Switzerland, he stands in the breaches of our walls, saying, with the Covenanters of Scotland,

"Strike -- for your altars and your fires;
Strike -- for the green graves of your sires;
For God – your native land."

For those men who were rebuilding Jerusalem, the trowel was the symbol of their work. those workers were masons. some used Squares to keep the walls straight and plumb-lines to keep them true. Others used rules to measure the length of the walls, or gauges to estimate their height. The majority, however, used trowels to mix the cement and to spread the mortar which bound the stones together. Their activities remind me of something which happened, a short time ago, at the Kraft Food Company in Chicago. When their head offices were being refaced, hundreds of thousands of bricks were used for this task. As the last brick was about to be laid, William E. Olsen, the construction superintendent, asked each bricklayer to scratch his name on it. There, high on the scaffolding, twenty members of the Local 21, A.F. of L., Bricklayers' Union, put their names on that brick. amongst those men were thirteen different nationalities -- Irish, Italian, Swedish, German, Portugese, Finnish, Polish, English, Scottish, Ukrainian, French, Armenian, and American. After the men had signed this brick, Olsen pulled out a piece of paper, and, at the bricklayers' suggestion, wrote out these sentiments: "We are men from many different homelands, with different religions and different customs. all have contributed their skill toward a common good. some believe the different peoples of the world can never solve their mutual problems. Here, all these

men worked, planned and co-operated until they had built something lasting an expression of their pride in America." That brick and that paper are now in the executive offices of the Kraft Food Company in Chicago. This shows what can be accomplished through better human relationships. As Masons, you are called to be builders builders of higher spiritual values, of better human relationships, of finer social standards, of stronger community services, of larger civic loyalties, of sounder public opinion.

The final quality of Nehemiah's leadership was his passion of soul. Some leaders have a passion for wealth, others for politics, some for learning, and a few for authority, but Nehemiah's was for his country. What Sanballat said in mockery, Nehemiah expressed in action -- "Will these feeble Jews revive the stones out of the heap of the rubbish?" (Neh. 4:2). "A revival from a rubbish heap." This is a striking phrase. It was Nehemiah's magnificent obsession, his ruling passion. Jerusalem was full of rubbish heaps. What the Goths and Vandals did to Rome, what Alexander the Great did to Tyre, what the Medes and Persians did to Babylon, what the Allied bombers did to Berlin, that is what Nebuchadnezzar did to Jerusalem. The entrances to the city were choked with burnt-out timbers from the gates. The streets of the city were blocked with cast-down masonry from the walls. The open places were piled high with rubble and ruins. This was the rubbish heap out of which Nehemiah would bring a revival.

The kind of revival I am thinking about is that described by two Air Force pilots who, during the Second World War, were forced down on a Pacific Island. After wandering through the jungle, they finally came to a clearing which had neat, clean buildings on it. They were taken to the chief of the tribe, and much to their surprise, were greeted in English. The pilots were surprised but discovered that English missionaries had come to that isolated island fifty years before and had actually transformed a tribe of cannibals into decent, clean Christian men and women. The chief of the tribe insisted on taking the pilots to see the native church. It was at the top of a steep hill. One of the pilots in describing the church said, "There was one of the most beautiful chapels I have ever seen. It was Gothic in form, finished inside with beautiful mahogany. The altar was a gem of beauty and reverence. I asked the chief who built it and he announced with pride, 'We did! with the help of the missionaries.' then he took us behind the church to show us a crude jumble of rocks piled like a pyre, with brown mud sticking between the stones, ugly and unsightly. That was our first church", said the chief. "What a contrast between the two", the pilot remarked. Then the chief remarked, "As we became better people we became better builders!" That is the secret of better building everywhere. As Canadians become better citizens, they become better builders. As Masons become better men, they become better builders. As church members become better Christians, they become better builders.

As the rallying point for this work, Nehemiah gave the people a watchword -- "Our God shall fight for us." (Neh. 4:L20). Every great movement in history had its watchword. For the French Revolution it was, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity." For the Democracies it is "Government of the people, by the people, for the people." By the use of watchwords, or battle cries, many a leader has changed defeat into victory. No Crusader in the army of Richard, the Lion Heart, could remain unmoved when he heard his leader's call to action, "Remember the Holy City." No sailor in Nelson's fleet could remain inactive when he read the signal from the flagship at Trafalgar, "England expects every man to do his duty." No soldier in the Allied forces could remain unchallenged when he heard Marshall Foch's stirring message just before the Battle of Mons, in 1918: "My center is giving way; my right is pushed back -- the situation is excellent! I'll attack!" Nor can anyone of this generation ever forget Sir Winston Churchill's "V-for Victory" slogan, together with his words of praise about the pilots of the Spitfires in England, "Never was so much owed by so many to so few." One can imagine Nehemiah's words having the same intention and creating the same effect. "The walls of Jerusalem are broken down; the gates of the city have been destroyed. The situation is excellent. We shall rebuild. And our God will fight for us." As Nehemiah and his associates advanced to their work, they might have said, as G.A. Studdert Kennedy once said:

"We shall build on!
On through the cynic's scorning
On through the coward's warning,
On through the cheat's suborning,
We shall build on!
Firm on the rock of ages,
City of saints and sages,
Laugh while the tempest rages,
We shall build on!
Christ, though my hands be bleeding,
Fierce though my flesh be pleading,
Still let me see Thee leading,
Let me build on!
Till through death's cruel dealing,
Brain wrecked and reason reeling,
I hear Love's trumpet pealing,
And I pass on."

"So Mote It Be!"

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