

Solomon's Temple.

"Lord God of Israel, there is no God like Thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with Thy servants that walk before Thee with all their heart..... Who hast kept Thy servant David, my father, that promisedst him and spakest also with Thy mouth and hast fulfilled it with Thine hand, as it is this day....."

But will God indeed dwell upon earth? behold the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee: how much less this house that I have builded.....

And hearken Thou to the supplication of Thy servant, and of Thy people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place, and hear Thou in heaven, Thy dwelling place - and when Thou hearest, forgive."

The foregoing are extracts from the V.S.L. and are indeed parts of the prayer of King Solomon made at the dedication of the Temple at Jerusalem. I quote them for a number of reasons, but chiefly as I feel no better introduction to such a subject as we are discussing tonight, could be found. They help us to picture in the mind's eye the wonderful and inspiring moment when the glorious achievement reached fulfillment, when the result of years of toil and endeavour stood before him in completion, the most wonderful structure the nation had ever known or dreamed about.

Indeed it is true to say that this was to be the turning point in the history of Israel, of which more a little later.

Those of you who are familiar with the beautiful Ceremony used in the Consecration of a new Lodge will remember that these extracts I have quoted from the V.S.L. form part of what is known as the Invocation and I never hear them without a feeling that they are in a sense perhaps the most pregnant and solemn part of that glorious ceremony, for it is then that the Founders, through the Consecrating Officer, are as it were, offering to the G.A.O.T.U. not just their efforts in forming their Lodge, but also their hopes and visions for it's future. I hope all Founders have visions, I feel sure they must do, for without such inspiration what future can there be? If there are those among you who have never been to a Consecration do please make every effort to do so at the first opportunity, I assure you, you will be well rewarded for any trouble you may take.

Before I proceed any farther I feel I ought to make it clear that any opinions I may express are my own, and like so many other matters relating to our Institution are open to a certain amount of interpretation according to the viewpoint of the individual, we cannot be dogmatic concerning a speculative science so long as we keep within the bounds of our Landmarks and maintain propriety.

A question which springs naturally to mind must be "Why does the Temple of Solomon play such an important part in Craft Ritual? Why should this event be chosen as the centre, for after all there are few of us who subscribe to the theory that Masonry as we know it can be traced in a direct line to Solomon. Here I believe we must go back to those times before Solomon, to the time of the Exodus, when Moses led the Children of Israel out of their Egyptian Captivity to the Promised Land. The crossing of the Red Sea and the confounding of the Egyptian Hosts is a miracle well known to all of us as God's revelation that His chosen race had paid for their previous sins and were received back into His Grace. But remember the Promised Land was not to be their's immediately, they had still to learn Trust, Faith and Humility as they wandered forty years in the wilderness.

At this time we are dealing with a nomadic race, who lived in tents but who in the course of time must have longed for a more settled and more satisfying mode of life. At this time too the Jewish Faith was undergoing a gradual but steady change, with the eradication of much that was pagan or partly so, as thought and reason were brought to bear, a higher and more exalted idea of God the Creator was forcing itself upon them and a finer and better shape to their religion was taking place.

When their wanderings ceased at last what more natural than the desire first to house their sacred relics in a worthy and safer place, something of which not only might they be proud, but something worthy, as far as they were able to create, of the Omnipotent Being in whom their hopes were centered.

To Solomon was given the glory of building the Temple, but we should not forget that much of the credit lies with David who collected much of the

wealth and materials and did a great deal of the preliminary work, though the fulfillment was granted to his son. There is perhaps a great lesson to be learned from this, that while we cannot all be granted the spectacular things to do, each may in some humble and even almost unknown manner, contribute to the general success of what we profess to strive for.

Well this was to be a building to surpass all other, known or dreamed of, imagination and ingenuity were given full rein, wealth, skill and labour were to be expended without limit and nothing was to be spared to make this the ultimate of perfection. And yet even in this we may see the sowing of the seed which was eventually to be Solomon's own downfall. So long as he strove without thought of self all was well. So long as he had before him the vision which spurred him on to serve God and God alone he was a great man, but as so often happens the earthly glory of his worldly power and splendour gradually pushed away the vision and his decline became inevitable. So often throughout history this same thing has happened, you do not need me to remind you of the many similar cases there have been, but the end is always the same.

Most of us know to our cost, something of the burden of taxation, and how we may perhaps sympathise with the Children of Israel for they must have issued many a groan because of the forced labour and taxes which they had to bear, even though it was in the great cause. Of course too, we must remember that in those days the mighty were indeed mighty, but the lowly were of little account, even their lives were considered the property of their rulers, to be spent freely when it was thought fit. Doubtless many poor souls were worn out with labour before the work was completed.

The important fact however was that the effort was not for the personal gratification of man or men, and so long as that remained the dominant factor the glory was assured. Around this central point were to spring all those things which go to the making of a great nation. Solomon's palace was built adjacent, and what more natural than that all who could do so, would copy his example insofar as their means permitted. Just as in England in the Middle Ages, the town or village grew around the castle, so here the city spread outwards from the Temple. With the benefits and comforts of permanent houses, the desire for the nomadic life would finally disappear and various cultural interests would be another natural sequence. The shaping of the nation's religion now had a tremendous impetus and the movement became swift and definite.

Now if we pause for a moment to consider this in its connection with our Craft we may see just why the pattern was weaved around King Solomon. Here was what laid not only the foundation of the Jewish religion, but also, of course, the Christian religion which was to follow. Looked at, at least from one aspect, I see the Temple as the foundation stone and in consequence a magnificent and inspired piece of symbolism. We know from our own experiences just how effective and intriguing this choice of a corner stone has been throughout the years and, indeed, remains to this day, and will doubtless continue into the far future.

It might be as well to remind you that the Temple was not quite in the nature of our modern churches, that is to say a place for public worship, in fact the public could not enter the sacred building, and such public worship as there was took place in the Temple Courts which surrounded the building. To Solomon it would be his private chapel, and the only others who entered would be the priests. At this period remember all men were far from equal, even in theory.

There is an expression known to many of you, it comes from the V.S.L. "There was no open vision". In other words a select few and only a select few, knew the sacred name of God, and without it close communion with Him was not possible. Therefore those few were at a tremendous advantage for they could approach closely to God while ordinary men must remain at a distance. At least that is how in brief they believed, and it is easy to conceive how all important and valuable that knowledge must have been regarded.

The site of the Temple was chosen with wisdom and skill, Mount Moriah which was a rocky eminence overlooking the surrounding countryside. Here it would dominate all else; a landmark which would draw the eyes of all men. But this site had many traditional memories which also caused it to be venerated; it was the old threshing floor of Araunah,

the Jebusite, it was the spot where Abraham prepared to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac, and it was the place where David set up his brazen altar. Seeped in tradition, excellent from a geographical point of view and chosen also because someone was clever enough to know that close at hand were vast quantities of stone which could be easily quarried.

Now this latter point appears to have been lost sight of for many generations, until, I think it was a little over a hundred years ago, a man discovered quite by accident, the vast underground quarries from which the stone undoubtedly came. It is a type of limestone, soft in its natural position, yet when brought into contact with the atmosphere, quickly hardens. Unfortunately I have never had the opportunity of seeing these quarries, but I have spoken with those who have, and they are vast and amazing. Here are tons of stone chippings of all sizes from the fashioning of the ashlar, great pieces of rock just severed for use and even some partly cut but not yet broken away from the living rock. Not only was this stone used for the actual building itself, but also to build up a large flat area, which in time became the Courts and surrounding platform. Today many Lodges possess mauls made from this stone, and so have a direct link with our traditional beginnings. Like the building of such huge monuments as the pyramids of Egypt it was a feat of great ingenuity and engineering ability. Herein of course, must lie the explanation of what was meant in the V.S.L. when it says "There was no sound of metal tool heard throughout the building" for the stone would be carved and shaped while yet easily workable below ground.

The actual building was, by modern standards, quite small, one authority giving the dimensions as 60 cubits long, 20 cubits wide and 30 cubits high. There are varying equivalents for the cubit, according to the type of material to be measured, but it is near enough for our purposes to regard the cubit as 18 inches, so we have there a building 90 x 30 x 45 feet.

To the Temple itself there was one entrance and one only, in the East. Now if this statement should cause you to reflect on the Three Entrances mentioned in the Third Degree, reflection will doubtless lead you to agree with me that these Entrances were in fact the entrances to the Temple Courts, on the S, N and E which indeed would be the likely places where the events of the Traditional History would more probably take place.

At the West End of the building was the Holy of Holies, occupying the full width, but only 20 cubits high, thus forming an upper chamber; and being 20 cubits in depth it was in the form of a perfect cube, a shape of significance. There were herein no windows and we can imagine the glimmering lamps would produce a dim mysterious light in keeping with the Presence. Here were housed the Ark of the Covenant with the Tables of the Sacred Law, guarded by the two Cherubins whose outstretched wings stretched across the entire West Wall facing towards the East. The figures were overlaid with gold and we can imagine how they would catch the faint light from the lamps and heighten the impressive atmosphere.

Entrance to the Holy of Holies was gained through doors of olive wood which were richly carved and inlaid with gold and through the Veils of Blue, Scarlet, Purple and Fine Linen.

In the main or perhaps I should say, larger portion were housed various utensils used for the sacrifices and ceremonials and doubtless here too would be conducted many of the rites private to the Priesthood.

Moving still farther to the East, that is outside the main building, was the Porch. This was believed to be the full width of the Temple itself and 10 cubits (15 feet) in depth. It was constructed on three sides, N, S & W. of double walls 5 cubits apart which formed a space in between of about seven and a half feet, and this was divided into rooms or cells in three tiers, in all 30 such rooms which were mainly the domestic quarters for the Temple Staff. The outer walls were higher than the inner and so created a kind of platform or clerestory. In the outer walls were lancet windows which gave light to the Porch.

Outside the Porch, again moving to the East were the Two Great Pillars, which need no description, but about which I would add a few interesting details. Opinion varies as to whether they were actually built into the Porch or if they stood apart and separate, though the

majority of opinion tends to the latter. Similar ornaments are to be found in old Babylon and Egypt where they were frequently used, and in all probability the idea was borrowed, but for the special purpose well known to us.

So far as the decoration was concerned it is quite likely the Pomegranates mentioned were in fact the flowers and not the fruit. The flowers are very decorative and were used frequently in ancient times. This theory does not in any way detract from the symbolism of the Pomegranate. It may even be that both the fruit and the flowers were incorporated.

The brass used to make the Pillars and also the Brazen Sea, supported by the figures of 12 oxen and the lavers, would not be what we know as brass, but bronze. The Brazen Sea was used by the Priests for their ceremonial bathing to symbolise spiritual cleansing and in the lavers were washed the sacrifices. The casting of these and other vessels must have been a wonderful feat which called for great skill and knowledge.

In addition to the various decorations I have mentioned there would be a great deal of costly woods, inlaid with gold and ivory, precious stones and fine and expensive fabrics, all of which would be imported and giving to the whole structure a rich and splendid appearance. Such a building to the Israelites of old must indeed have surpassed all else. Time, effort, money, skill and ingenuity, indeed everything that man's brain could imagine to create a house fit for God.

I have dwelt but briefly on a subject which is inexhaustible, there is one other aspect I would like to mention and with it draw my paper to a conclusion "What remains today of all the glory which was the wonder of the then known world? Solomon's glory faded as he became more interested in worldly things, his end as you know, was a sorry shadow of his former greatness, and those who followed him carried the nation farther and farther down the hill, until eventually the Temple was destroyed and the people taken once again into captivity until they could once more find grace. Their story can be found elsewhere for those who would know it.

Today the site of the Temple which meant so much to Jew or Christian and to Masons is occupied by a Mohammedan Mosque, inside which a piece of the black living rock, so pregnant with tradition, comes up through the floor. Below is the hole and channel through which the winnowed grain of Araunah ran into the storage cavern beneath and where in later times flowed the blood from the sacrifices to drain away through other cut channels, which are still there, into the nearby pool of Siloam.

This is little to leave, may we not learn from it a lesson, and so strive to keep the spiritual Temple we are striving to build as members of the glorious craft, free from the destroying hand of time, that none may say in days to come. Achabod the Glory has departed.

Biblical References

David forbidden to build. 2 Samuel 7. 1 Chronicles 17 & 28.
Solomon to build. 2 Samuel 7. 1 Chronicles 17. 28.
David's preparations. 1 Chronicles 28/11.
Solomon builds. 1 Kings 6. 2 Chronicles 3 & 4.
No hammer or axe heard in the building. 1 Kings 6 & 7.
Dimensions and ornaments. 2 Chronicles 3 & 4.
Dedication. 1 Kings 8. 2 Chronicles 6 & 7.
The Pillars. 1 Kings 7.
Destruction of 2 Kings 25.

Note - Temple was the name given to the whole sacred precincts on Mount Moriah, including the sanctuary and the various courts.