

THE ROUGH AND PERFECT ASHLARS.

SUFFICIENT JUSTICE IS NOT DONE TO THESE EMBLEMS IN OUR LECTURES. TO SAY THAT THE ROUGH ASHLAR IS A STONE, ROUGH AND UNHEWN, AS WHEN TAKEN FROM THE QUARRY, AND THAT IT THEREFORE REPRESENTS TO US THE MIND OF MAN IN HIS PRIMITIVE STATE, ROUGH AND UNPOLISHED, TAKES US AWAY FROM FREEMASONRY ALTOGETHER.

IN THE LODGE WE HAVE TO CONSIDER THE PERSON WHO HAS JUST COME AMONGST US AND ^{UPON} WHOM THE CRAFT PROPOSES TO USE ITS WORKING TOOLS. NOW WE DO NOT ADMIT ABSOLUTELY ROUGH AND UNHEWN MATERIAL INTO OUR LODGES, OUR WORKING TOOLS ARE NOT THE PICKAXE AND THE DRILL. WE DEMAND THAT A CANDIDATE FOR OUR MYSTERIES SHALL HAVE UNDERGONE THE PRELIMINARY PROCESSES BEFORE HE PRESENTS HIMSELF. THE TONGUE OF GOOD REPORT MUST HAVE BEEN HEARD IN HIS FAVOUR, AND HIS CHARACTER OPEN TO INVESTIGATION. HIS MOTIVES MUST BE SUCH AS TO DO HIM CREDIT, AND FURTHERMORE HE MUST BE REASONABLY WELL EDUCATED. THESE ARE CONSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENTS, BUT THEY REPRESENT BUT A SMALL PORTION OF THAT WHICH THE LODGE USUALLY EXACTS. HIS HABITS, HIS SOCIAL STANDING, HIS MEANS, HAVE ALL FORMED SUBJECTS OF ENQUIRY, AND ^{SO} THE MATERIAL THUS ULTIMATELY ADMITTED INTO THE LODGE TO BE OPERATED ^A ON, IS IN A FAIRLY ADVANCED STAGE, AND THAT IS THE REASON WHY THE ROUGH ASHLAR, AS IT APPEARS IN ^{OUR} LODGE, IS NOT A ROUGH UNHEWN BLOCK, BUT ALREADY APPROXIMATES TO THE SHAPE OF A CUBE. TRUE, IT LACKS POLISH AND MUCH REMAINS TO BE DONE, ^{BUT} AND EVERY DAY'S WORK BRINGS IT NEARER TO PERFECTION. THERE ARE STILL KNOBS AND EXCRESCENCES TO BE KNOCKED OFF WITH THE SHARP EDGE OF THE GAVEL, AND THERE IS STILL MORE WORK FOR THE CHISEL, BUT THE FINAL PROCESSES ARE THOSE OF GRINDING, AND SO WHILST AT THE OUTSET THE BROTHER'S CHARACTER IS FORMED, PRECEPT UPON PRECEPT, LIFE UPON LIFE, AND HE HAS TO SUBMIT TO AUTHORITY AND DISCIPLINE, HE ONLY ATTAINS THE FINAL STAGE BY ATTRITION, THAT IS, BY BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION WITH HIS FELLOWS. THE PLACE OF THE ROUGH ASHLAR IS IN THE SOUTH, IN FRONT OF THE JUNIOR WARDEN.

THE PERFECT ASHLAR IS PLACED IN THE WEST, JUST BEFORE THE SENIOR WARDEN. IT SHOULD BE SUSPENDED FROM A TRIPOD, OR A DERRICK ^{MEANS OF} BY A ROPE SECURED TO A WINCH, AND ATTACHED THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF A PULLEY TO A LEWIS LET INTO THE SURFACE OF THE ASHLAR.

THERE IS NO PARTICULAR STONE THAT IS CALLED ASHLAR, NAME MAY BE GIVEN TO A FREESTONE FROM THE QUARRY; THIS

DICTIONARY DEFINITION. EXACTLY WHAT IT MEANS HOWEVER IS A MATTER OF DOUBT. SOME HAVE SUGGESTED THAT IT IS A STONE THAT IS EASILY DETACHABLE, WHICH MIGHT MEAN A LAMINATED OR STRATIFIED STONE SUCH AS SLATE. SUCH STONES ARE FOR THE MOST PART SOFT, AND INCAPABLE OF TAKING THE HIGH POLISH THAT CAN BE IMPARTED TO GRANITE OR MARBLE. STILL, SO LONG AS GOOD AND HONEST MATERIAL IS REPRESENTED, ITS EXACT DESCRIPTION DOES NOT MATTER. BUT THE CRAFT IS GENUINELY CONCERNED THAT THE QUALITY OF THE MATERIAL SHALL BE BEYOND SUSPICION.

THE CRAFT CAN DO MUCH IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF CHARACTER, BUT IT CANNOT TRANSFORM MATERIAL. IT WILL TAKE ^{THE} ROUGH AND MAKE IT PERFECT, BUT IT CANNOT TURN BASE MATERIAL INTO GOOD. THE CRAFT WILL GIVE A BROTHER WHAT HE HAS NOT, BUT IT CANNOT MAKE HIM WHAT HE IS NOT. A BROTHER WHO IS ADMITTED AMONGST US MUST BE A VERY EXCEPTIONAL CHARACTER IF FREEMASONRY CANNOT MAKE SOMETHING OF HIM, ALWAYS SUPPOSING THAT HIS MOTIVES AND HIS CHARACTER ARE NOT INTRINSICALLY BAD. FREEMASONRY WILL ENABLE HIS MOTIVES. HAS HE COME TO JOIN US URGED THERETO BY CURIOSITY? WELL, IT IS NOT A BAD MOTIVE, THOUGH A BETTER MIGHT BE CONCEIVED. STILL EVEN CURIOSITY CAN BE ENABLED, AND THE BROTHER WILL BE LED TO EXPLORE THE SYMBOLISM, THE HISTORY, AND THE JURISPRUDENCE OF THE CRAFT. HE MAY BE SOCIALLY INCLINED, AND HE WILL NOT VALUE THE SOCIAL SIDE ANY LESS BECAUSE OF THE NECESSITY OF KEEPING HIMSELF WITHIN DUE BOUNDS.

HE MAY FIRST OF ALL NOTE, THAT IN ITS PASSAGE FROM THE ROUGH TO THE PERFECT CONDITION, THE ASHLAR WAS CONSTANTLY BEING REDUCED IN ITS WEIGHT AND ITS DIMENSIONS, THE PROCESSES LEADING TO PERFECTION ARE, VIRTUALLY, THE REMOVAL OF SUPERFLUOUS MATERIAL. NOTHING IS ADDED. THE ROUGH ASHLAR CONTAINED WITHIN ITSELF THE PERFECT FORM, JUST AS IT IS WELL SAID THAT EVERY BLOCK OF MARBLE, HOWEVER ROUGH AND UNHEWN IT MAY BE, CONTAINS AN APOLLO, OR A VENUS. AND SO THERE IS IN EVERY HUMAN BEING THE GERM, EVEN IF IT BE NOTHING MORE, THAT, PROPERLEY CULTIVATED, MAY PRODUCE OR EVOLVE INTO THE PERFECT CHARACTER. AND WE CLAIM THAT, ASSISTED BY THE SECRETS OF OUR MASONIC ARTS, A BROTHER WILL FIND THE ROAD TO PERFECTION MADE EASY FOR HIM, BECAUSE IT IS WELL TRODDEN AND PLAINLY MARKED OUT.

THE PROCESS OF FASHIONING THE PERFECT ASHAR IS ONE ATTENDED WITH A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF TROUBLE. THERE ARE FREQUENT REFERENCES TO THE SQUARE; CHIPS, LITTER, AND DUST LIE ABOUT HELPING TO CONCEAL THE GROWING PERFECTION OF FORM, JUST AS THE SCAFFOLDING SERVES TO CONCEAL THE PERFECT FORM OF THE TEMPLE ARISING BEHIND IT. STILL WE KNOW THAT IN GOOD TIME THE DEBRIS WILL BE REMOVED AND THE SCAFFOLDING PULLED DOWN, AND AS WE GAZE AT THE OPERATIONS OF THE MAJON AND THE BUILDER, IT IS NOT THE AMOUNT OF LITTER, NOR THE EXTENT OF THE SCAFFOLDING THAT IMPRESSES US, NOR ARE WE TROUBLED BECAUSE THE SCAFFOLDING IS UNSIGHTLY. HEREIN MAY WE NOT DERIVE A USEFUL MORAL LESSON? THE INCIDENTS OF DAILY LIFE, OUR OCCUPATIONS, OUR INTERCOURSE WITH THE WORLD, OFTIMES ACCOMPANIED WITH FRICTION, SOMETIMES UNPLEASANT, OUR VARIOUS DUTIES IN THE STATION OF LIFE WE HAVE BEEN CALLED UPON TO FILL, NOT ALWAYS HONOURABLE POSSIBLY IN PUBLIC ESTIMATION, THE TROUBLE AND LOSSES, THE SICKNESS AND BEREAVEMENT WHICH HAVE ATTENDED OUR COURSE, NONE OF THESE ARE PERMANENT, AND EVERY ONE OF THEM HAS ITS SHARE IN THE FINAL SHAPING OF THE THING OF BEAUTY, THAT IN THE GOOD TIME OF THE GREAT ARCHITECT OF THE UNIVERSE WILL BE REVEALED. GOD WILL NOT ASK ANYONE AT THE JUDGMENT DAY WHAT HE DID FOR A LIVING. FAR MORE IMPORTANT WILL BE THE QUESTION OF HOW HE DID IT.

LET US NOW CONSIDER THE PERFECT ASHLAR AS IT APPEARS IN OUR LODGES, HAVING PASSED ALL THE NECESSARY TESTS, AND THE FOLLOWING REFLECTIONS OCCUR TO US. OBVIOUS CHARACTERISTICS ARE ITS UPRIGHTNESS IN WHATEVER POSITION IT IS PLACED, OR EVEN IF CARELESSLY THROWN DOWN. IN FACT, IF PLACED IN ANY OTHER THAN AN UPRIGHT POSITION IT IS UNSTABLE, AND CAN ONLY BE KEPT IN SUCH A POSITION BY THE OPERATION OF EXTERNAL RESTRAINT. TO ALL OUTWARD APPEARANCE, LIKE THE CANDIDATE IN THE NORTH EAST, IT IS JUST AND UPRIGHT, AND BY "ALL" APPEARANCE IS MEANT FROM WHATEVER STANDPOINT IT BE VIEWED. FURTHER, TO ALL APPEARANCE IT DOES NOT MATTER WHEN THE BUILDER TAKES IT IN HAND, WHICH OF ITS SIDES IS PLACED OUTERMOST. IN THE CASE OF AN IGNEOUS STONE, UNSTRATIFIED, IT WOULD SEEM TO BE A MATTER OF INDIFFERENCE WHICH WAS THE RIGHT SIDE OUT, OR THE RIGHT SIDE TOP. THE PRACTICAL BUILDER WILL TALK OF THE WAY IN WHICH IT LAY IN THE QUARRY FROM WHICH IT WAS EXTRACTED, BUT HE WOULD NEED TO BE A VERY EXPERT BUILDER WHO WOULD SAY WITH CONFIDENCE OF THE PERFECT ASHLAR HOW IT ORIGINATED.

NOW IN THE SOMEWHAT UNGRAMMATICAL LANGUAGE OF THE WORSHIPFUL MASTER, WHO TELLS THE CANDIDATE THAT "WE APPLY THESE TOOLS TO OUR MORALS"; WE CAN APPLY THIS FACT TO ILLUSTRATE A VERY VALUABLE LESSON. MOST OF US POSSESS A RIGHT SIDE OUT AND ALSO A RIGHT SIDE UP, AND TOO OFTEN WHICH IT IS DEPENDS UPON SMALL ACCIDENTS OF TIME AND CIRCUMSTANCES. WE PRESENT A CERTAIN FACE AND DEMEANOUR UNDER ONE SET OF CONDITIONS, AND WHEN THOSE CONDITIONS CHANGE WE EXECUTE A RIGHT ABOUT FACE. HOW FREQUENTLY WE HEAR IT SAID OF ONE WE KNOW, "YOU NEVER KNOW WHERE TO FIND HIM." BUT THE PERFECT ASHLAR TEACHES US TO PRESENT THE SAME UNIFIED EXTERIOR, THE SAME COURTESY, THE SAME EQUANIMITY AND FORTITUDE ON ALL AND EVERY OCCASION, WHETHER OF SORROW OR OF JOY. IT IS THIS FEATURE OF CHARACTER THAT CAUSES THE FREEMASON TO BE REGARDED, IN THE LANGUAGE OF OUR RITUAL, AS "ONE TO WHOM THE TROUBLED HEART MAY POUR FORTH ITS SORROWS, AND FIND CONSOLATION, AND TO WHOM THE DISTRESSED MAY PREFER HIS SUIT AND FIND RELIEF."

THE PERFECT ASHLAR IS AS NEAR AS POSSIBLE A PERFECT CUBE. BY ITSELF THIS CUBE IS OF LITTLE USE, SAVE FOR THE PURPOSE OF AFFORDING FOOD FOR THOUGHT. THE REAL VALUE OF THE CUBE BEGINS WHEN IT IS LAID SIDE BY SIDE WITH, OR SUPERIMPOSED UPON ITS FELLOWS. HENCE WE LEARN THAT THE PURPOSES OF FREEMASONRY HAVE NOT BEEN ACHIEVED WHEN THEY HAVE MADE FOR THE EXCELLENCE OF ONE OR TWO BROTHERS, THE LODGE IS THE TEMPLE, AND EVERY CONSTITUENT OUGHT TO BE OF UNIFORM EXCELLENCE.

WHILE THE NEWLY ADMITTED FREEMASON IS FREELY LIKENED TO THE ROUGH ASHLAR, HE IS NO WHERE LIKENED TO THE PERFECT ASHLAR. IF HE WERE IT WOULD BE TANTAMOUNT TO SAYING THAT PERFECTION IS TERMINUS. WHEREAS WHENEVER THE RITUAL REFERS TO THE POSSIBILITY OF PERFECTION BEING ATTAINED, IT IS ALWAYS WITH A QUALIFICATION. WE CANNOT PUT A STOP TO THE WORKING OF THE LAW OF EVOLUTION BY SAYING THAT THERE IS ANY POINT AT WHICH IMPROVEMENT BECOMES IMPOSSIBLE. THAT IS WHY LIFE IS DESCRIBED AS A BATTLE IN WHICH THERE IS NO PAUSE IN THE FIGHTING, A JOURNEY TOWARDS A GOAL WHICH IS FOREVER RECEDING. THE PERFECT ASHLAR IS A WITNESS TO THIS BECAUSE AN ABSOLUTELY PERFECT CUBE IS UNATTAINABLE. IF IT WERE, THEN SUCH PERFECT CUBES WOULD COLLIDE WITH EACH OTHER BY ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE ALONE.

STILL WE WILL DO OUR BEST, UNDETERRED BY THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF REACHING A LIMIT, AND SO LONG AS NATURE HOLDS ONE UNDISCOVERED SECRET, WE WILL GO ON LEARNING AND INVESTIGATING THE HIDDEN MYSTERIES OF NATURE AND SCIENCE; SO LONG AS THERE IS ONE GRACE OF CHARACTER NOT YET ACHIEVED WE WILL PRESS FORWARD, REMEMBERING THAT EACH STEP GAINED ONLY SERVES TO REVEAL MORE; SO LONG AS THERE IS ONE BANEFUL AND MALIGNANT PASSION FROM WHICH THE HEART IS NOT YET PURIFIED, WE SHALL STRIVE TO EXTINGUISH IT.

THE WORD "PERFECT" HAS ONE OR TWO SUBSIDIARY MEANINGS WHICH WE MIGHT NOTICE. IT SIGNIFIES FOR INSTANCE "COMPLETE". FROM THE PERFECT ASHLAR THEN WE DERIVE A WARNING AGAINST SPECIALISING IN CHARACTER, CULTIVATING ONE VIRTUE TO THE POSSIBLE EXCLUSION OF OTHERS. THE WORD ALSO CAN MEAN "FINALITY," AND IF WE ADAPT THIS INTERPRETATION IT IS A WARNING AGAINST SLOVENLINESS OF LIFE. HOW MANY LIVES ARE LITTERED ABOUT WITH THE DEBRIS OF HALF ACCOMPLISHED RESOLUTIONS, LOOSE ENDS, BOOKS HALF READ, OR INTENTIONS HALF CARRIED OUT.

WE HAVE ALREADY COMMENTED ON THE FACT, THAT THE PERFECT ASHLAR PRESENTS WHAT IS VIRTUALLY THE SAME FACE IN EVERY POSITION. THIS FACT FURTHER IMPRESSES UPON US THAT THE FREEMASON SHOULD PURSUE THE SAME UNDEVIATING LINE OF CONDUCT UNDER WHATEVER CIRCUMSTANCES HE FINDS HIMSELF. THERE IS BUT ONE STANDARD OF RIGHT AND WRONG FOR EVERY TIME AND PLACE. THERE IS NOT ONE GOD OF THE HILLS, AND ANOTHER OF THE PLAINS, NOT ONE CODE OF MORALS FOR THE HOME CIRCLE AND ANOTHER WHERE WE ARE NOT KNOWN, OR ONE FOR BUSINESS AND ANOTHER FOR PLEASURE.

THE PERFECT ASHLAR BEARS NO MARKS OF ANY TOOL UPON IT, THIS IS DUE TO THE FACT THAT THE FINAL PROCESSES WERE QUITE INDEPENDENT OF ANY TOOL. FRESH FROM THE CHISEL, IT DISPLAYED THE LONG PARALLEL LINES LEFT BY THAT IMPLEMENT. THE CHISEL WAS INCAPABLE OF IMPARTING THE FINAL TOUCHES THAT LEFT IT SMOOTH AND POLISHED. THIS POINTS OUT TO US WHAT IS THE FINAL EDUCATING PROCESS. THE MECHANISED PROCESSES OF EDUCATION, REPRESENTED IN OUR TEACHING BY THE CHISEL, DO NOT NECESSARILY IMPART THAT URBANITY, GENTLENESS, SYMPATHY, CONSIDERATION, AND UNSELFISHNESS WHICH WE ASSOCIATE WITH THE HIGHEST CULTURE, THE FURTHEST DEVELOPMENT OF CHARACTER. EDUCATION, AS THE WORD IS GENERALLY UNDERSTOOD, MAY CONCEIVABLY LEAVE ITS SUBJECT PRAGMATIC AND DOGMATIC, VAIN AND SELF-OPINIONATED, AND POSSIBLY INTOLERANT.

BUT AFTER THE CHISEL HAS DONE ALL THAT IS POSSIBLE WITH SUCH A TOOL, THERE COMES THE GRINDING, AND THIS IS ONLY PERFORMED WITH THE AID OF A LUBRICANT, WATER, LITTLE BY LITTLE THE ROUGH PLACES BECOME PLANE, THE CORRUGATIONS LEFT BY THE CHISEL DISAPPEAR, AND THE WHOLE SURFACE BECOMES FIRST OF ALL UNIFORM, THEN SMOOTH, AND LAST OF ALL IT ACQUIRES POLISH, IF THE MATERIAL IS CAPABLE OF RECEIVING IT. THIS IS THE EFFECT OF ATRITION AND IT REVEALS TO US TO WHAT EXTENT ASSOCIATION WITH OUR FELLOWS ASSISTS IN THE FORMATION OF CHARACTER. THE MONKS AND HERMITS OF OLD WHO TOOK THEIR BOOKS AND MANUSCRIPTS INTO THE CELL, AND SECLUDED THEMSELVES FROM THE WORLD, MADE AN IMMENSE MISTAKE. THEY THOUGHT THEY COULD MOST EFFECTUALLY RENOUNCE THE WORLD, THE FLESH, AND THE DEVIL BY HIDING THEMSELVES, AND THEY FORGOT ALL THE TIME THAT THE WORLD, THE FLESH, AND THE DEVIL WOULD NOT RENOUNCE THEM, AND THAT THERE WAS NO PLACE SO SECLUDED AS TO BE BEYOND THEIR REACH. BY THUS GETTING BEYOND REACH OF CONTACT WITH HUMAN EMOTIONS, THEY MISSED THE MOST VALUABLE OF ALL TRAINING. THE MAN OF HIGH CHARACTER OVERCOMES THE WORLD, HE DOES NOT RUN AWAY FROM IT.

THE NEARER THE ASULAR APPROACHES PERFECTION THE SHARPER AND MORE UNCOMPROMISING ARE ITS EDGES. IT WILL OCCUPY THE SPACE PROVIDED FOR IT, BUT IT DEMANDS THAT SPACE TO THE FULL AND IS CONTENT WITH NO LESS. ON THE OTHER HAND IT DOES NOT ENCRUCH ON THE RIGHTS OF ITS FELLOWS IN THE SLIGHTEST DEGREE. AND AS WE PROGRESS TOWARDS FINALITY, DOES NOT OUR SENSE OF THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RIGHT AND WRONG BECOME MORE ACUTE? OUR SENSE OF WHAT IS PERFECTLY JUST IS LESS AND LESS SUBJECT TO DEVIATION. WE ARE INCREASINGLY CONSCIOUS OF OUR NEIGHBOURS' CLAIM TO RESPECT AND CONSIDERATION.

EVERY MAN HAS AN EXACT PLACE TO FILL IN THE WORLD, THAT HE DOES NOT ALWAYS FILL IT, WHETHER FROM LACK OF INCLINATION OR OF OPPORTUNITY, DOES NOT AFFECT THE PROPOSITION, BUT IT CONSTITUTES THE ONE FAILURE OF THE ANALOGY WE HAVE BEEN DRAWING. IT IS THE PRIVILEGE OF THE CREATURE THAT HE HAS THE POWER OF DISPUTING THE WILL OF THE CREATOR, BUT LET IT BE REMEMBERED THAT ANY SUCH DISPUTE CAN ONLY END IN ONE WAY. THE ONLY STONES ADMITTED INTO THE BUILDING ARE THOSE WHICH CONFORM IN EVERY WAY TO THE DESIGNS OF THE GREAT ARCHITECT OF THE UNIVERSE.

AND FINALLY, NOTE THAT WHEN PERFECTED THE ASHLAR IS ONLY ABOUT TO COMMENCE ANOTHER BOUNDLESS CAREER OF POSSIBILITIES. IT HANGS IN THE LODGE ROOM, BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH, SUSPENDED FROM ITS DERRICK, AND THERE IS NO INDICATION WHERE IN THE TEMPLE ITS FINAL DESTINATION IS TO BE. THE FUTURE IS WITH THE GREAT ARCHITECT OF THE UNIVERSE, TO WHOM WE CANNOT DICTATE. THE SUSPENDED ASHLAR THEREFORE TEACHES US THE LESSON OF RESIGNATION TO HIS DIVINE WILL. ONE THING WE MAY BE CERTAIN OF, THAT HIS WISDOM HAS ASSIGNED EACH ONE OF US A PLACE IN THAT TEMPLE, AND THAT NOTHING WE HAVE DONE OR ACCOMPLISHED TOWARD THE ATTAINMENT OF PERFECTION, BUT WILL FIND ITS REWARD IN HIS APPROBATION.

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