

27 Feb 1934
Marcia Lodge.

Masonic building materials.

It is said that masonry is not a religion; but it is described as a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory, and illustrated by symbols. Nevertheless, if we were to accept a dictionary definition of the word "religion", we should be up against many difficulties.

Let me quote in brief from Chambers' English Dictionary :-

The recognition of supernatural powers and of the duty lying upon man to yield obedience to these : The belief in a supernatural embodiment of power, wisdom, and goodness, governing the universe and holding moral relations with man : the performance of our duties of love and obedience towards God : piety : any system of faith and worship : sense of obligation and duty.

If we admit the possibility that masonry may be a religion, we shall probably claim for it that it is most simple yet all embracing. It permits of any freeman of mature age, sound judgment, and strict morals, qualifying for admission to the order, subject to a declaration by him that there is a Supreme and Divine Being. Such an acknowledgment embodies the necessity for submissio to certain very simple laws, or, in other words, we have to observe our duty to God, to our neighbor, and to ourselves.

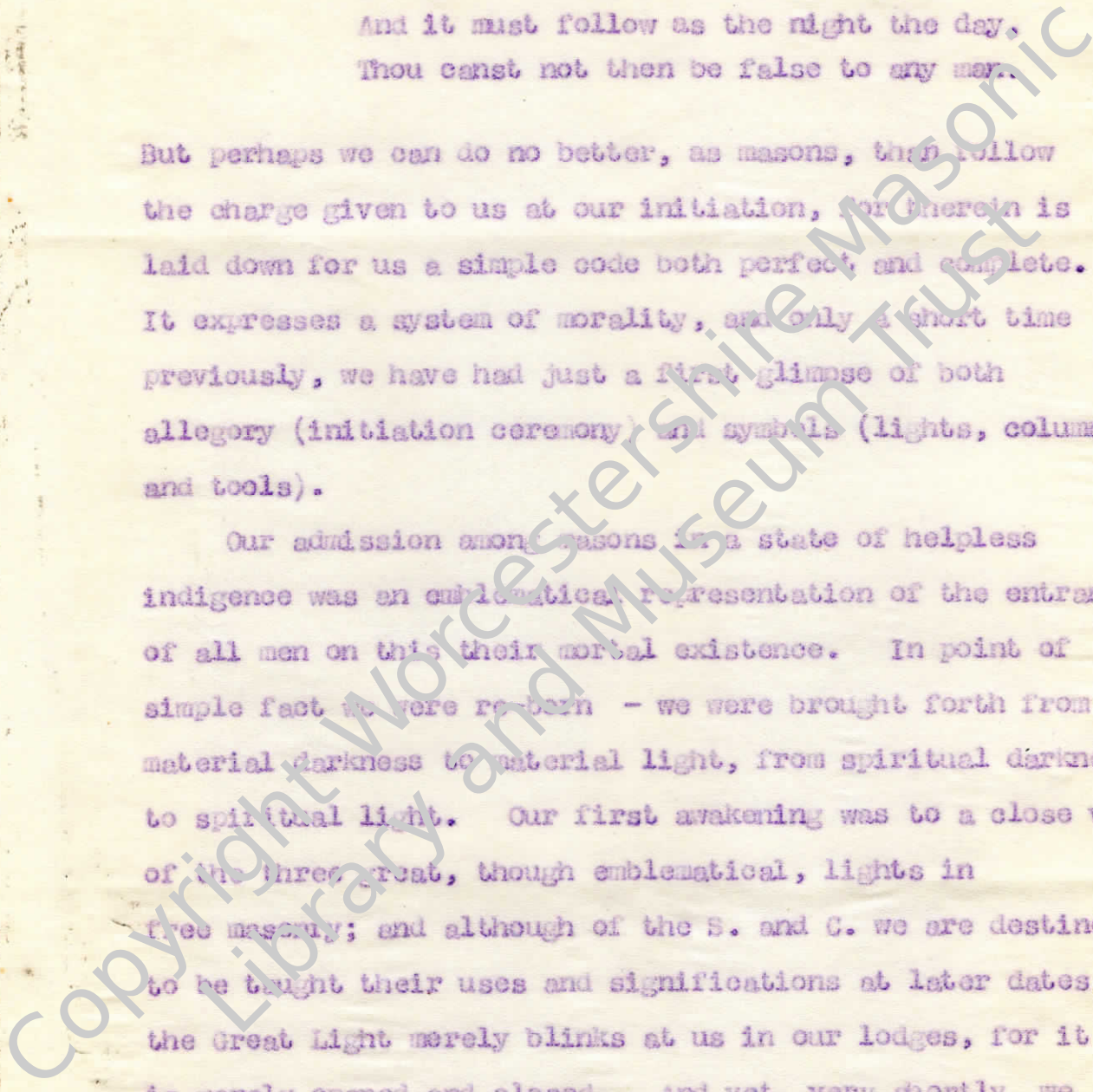
As to our neighbor and ourselves, Shakespeare simplifies matters for us in "Hamlet" when Polonius advises Laertes -

This above all -
To thine ownself be true;
And it must follow as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

But perhaps we can do no better, as masons, than follow the charge given to us at our initiation, for therein is laid down for us a simple code both perfect, and complete. It expresses a system of morality, and only a short time previously, we have had just a first glimpse of both allegory (initiation ceremony) and symbols (lights, column, and tools).

Our admission among masons in a state of helpless indigence was an emblematical representation of the entrance of all men on this their mortal existence. In point of simple fact we were re-born - we were brought forth from material darkness to material light, from spiritual darkness to spiritual light. Our first awakening was to a close view of the three great, though emblematical, lights in free masonry; and although of the S. and C. we are destined to be taught their uses and significations at later dates, the Great Light merely blinks at us in our lodges, for it is merely opened and closed. And yet, very shortly, we listen and give our undivided attention to a charge, usually given by the J.W. What do we hear?

Let me recommend to your most serious contemplation
.....
Therein you will be taught



. to God, to your neighbor,
and to yourself.

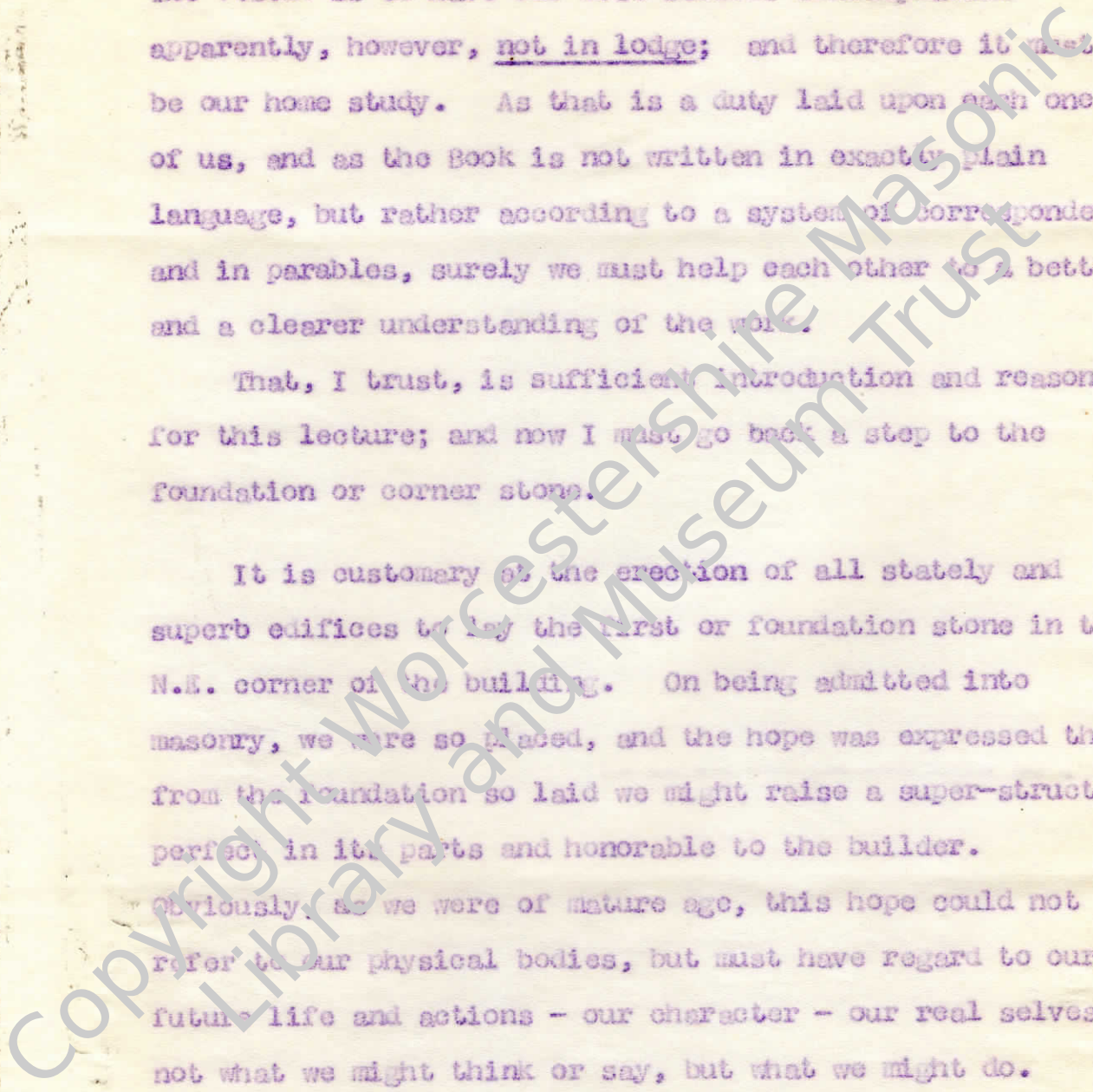
The V.S.L. is to have our most serious contemplation -
apparently, however, not in lodge; and therefore it must
be our home study. As that is a duty laid upon each one
of us, and as the Book is not written in exactly plain
language, but rather according to a system of correspondences
and in parables, surely we must help each other to a better
and a clearer understanding of the work.

That, I trust, is sufficient introduction and reason
for this lecture; and now I must go back a step to the
foundation or corner stone.

It is customary at the erection of all stately and
superb edifices to lay the first or foundation stone in the
N.E. corner of the building. On being admitted into
masonry, we were so placed, and the hope was expressed that
from the foundation so laid we might raise a super-structure
perfect in its parts and honorable to the builder.

Obviously, as we were of mature age, this hope could not
refer to our physical bodies, but must have regard to our
future life and actions - our character - our real selves -
not what we might think or say, but what we might do.

Whilst the laying of the foundation might have had some
reference to the physical work done by the Master and his
Wardens, I think we may say that the candidate made a fresh
start in his spiritual life, the foundation of which was laid
in the heart and mind of the candidate. If we can see and
admit that truth, the way is paved for progress.



The first stone having been laid, (the heart and mind having been prepared), the candidate is to raise a superstructure. To do that he must have a plan and materials, for who among us would commence to build even a rabbit hutch or a pigeon pen without some design and preparation. Our plan, or model to which we must work, is the temple. Our materials are those enumerated in the V.S.L. to which our attention has been so forcibly directed; and yet, until we reach the Chair we have no opportunity for even reading it in our lodge.

Now let us get back to our own masonic wording. We are to raise a superstructure. This conveys the idea of a building - a temple. Perhaps that is why we hear so much (or so little) about Solomon's Temple, and may be that is to be our pattern or plan. We have never seen a picture nor a certain plan of that magnificent building. We can read chapters of its details and marvel at its wonders and beauty, speculating meanwhile as to why we are told so much and yet are given no picture of the finished structure. Present day architects tell us that any attempt to rebuild in accordance with dimensions and details handed down to us would result in failure. Why then are all these details preserved to us ?

Obviously we are expected to be builders or workers, but not in an operative sense. We are presented with tools and are told their uses, but are admonished at the same time to apply these tools to our morals, (meaning, of course, our character formation).

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For certain reasons I must exercise care in referring to some of these tools this evening. With three of them we are enabled to plan our work and lay out the ground for the foundation of our structure. The common gavel and the chisel are our only real working tools, and then we get square, level, and plumb rule, which again are for checking our work. Apart therefore from the means of planning our work and checking it as we progress, we are equipped with "the advantages of education" and "the force of conscience".

There is a reason for this absence of operative or building tools. Solomon's Temple was built without sound of tools. All materials were so prepared in advance that everything "went together" and formed one harmonious whole. These materials came from most parts of the then known world, and we find in our V.M.L. many details of the timber, stone, bronze, silver, and gold. It is desirable that our character formation or foundation should not be a noisy process. Let there be no proclamation on the housetops that we are going to be or to do this, that, and the other. In our days of infancy and childhood we may be babbling brooks and murmuring streams, telling the world that we are going to flood the seas; but when we reach years of discretion we must become "still waters that run deep".

As masons we should know something about the early preparations for the temple site. King David had in his heart the wish to build the temple, but that was forbidden him. Nevertheless, he purchased at his own expense the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, and that is the

very ground upon which the temple was built. His own words in regard to the transaction were "Neither will I offer unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing." In addition to this provision of land, however, do not let us overlook the fact that this fighting King stored up vast quantities of gold, silver, and other treasures collected from his various enemies, and definitely earmarked these for the service of the temple. He also made friends of rulers in adjacent countries, and of these, probably the most notable was Hiram, King of Tyre, with whom he may have discussed his original wish but frustrated intention to build a temple to his God. Having been told that his heart's desire was to be carried out by his son and successor, King Solomon, it is pretty certain that David entered into tentative arrangements with Hiram, King of Tyre, who afterwards was so ready to co-operate with Solomon when the necessary approach was made to him. And so we find that the men of Tyre and Sidon, who were skilled workers in timber, were engaged in the work of felling and fashioning cedars and pines in large quantities.

We are also told that Hiram, King of Tyre, provided Solomon with a peculiarly skilled man, Hiram Abiff, who was probably the architect of the building, providing the many overseers with the necessary plans, himself superintending the work and in particular dealing with the casting of the pillars and many vessels detailed for use in the temple.

The foundations were to be "great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones".

To quote again -

"And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone
"made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was
"neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the
"house, while it was in building."

The fear of the effects of lightning may have had something to do with the command not to use any tool of iron upon the building. Certain superstitions, however, must not be overlooked. The use or presence of iron has been and still is rigorously excluded from consecration and other initiatory ceremonies among both civilised and uncivilised people. Its presence might interfere with the flow of magnetism from man to man, say from priest to novice. (Mention the naked knee to mother earth or to virgin stone.)

The stonemasons were called "giblims", and it would be of immense interest if we could be told how they carried out their work, and how they transported their finished stones from quarry to final position. In the "Sunday Dispatch" of 16th July 1933 it is stated by Professor O. A. Newell that the Hebrews cut the enormous blocks of stone with radium which they called the schamir or schimar. This was brought from a secret hiding place in the mountains. It was no bigger than a grain of barley, but so powerful was the force of its invisible ray that in order to preserve oneself it was necessary to enclose it in a leaden shell lined with linseed flour. It was sufficient to trace a line on the rock and to apply the schamir or schimar, when the rocks split silently from

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top to bottom, each of the two faces being perfectly smooth.
Refer here to Dr. Cohen's letter 30 January 1934.

At least portion of the temple rested on solid virgin rock; but what of the sizes of the next stones. (Three such as these, but not in the temple, are said to measure respectively 63, 63½ and 64 feet long by 13 feet square. Another is recorded as 70 feet long by 14 feet square, or say 13,720 cubic feet. All these have actually been cut out of the rock.) Biblical records of the temple mention foundation stones of 15 feet square (or cube), and 12 feet square (or cube) for the remaining four courses, that is calculating a cubit as 18 inches. It is to be regretted that the sacred historian has not told us how these extraordinary dimensions were handled, for in addition to the weight of probably more than 500 tons, there was the mass of 3375 cubic feet of stone and its unwieldiness with which to contend.

The Kingdom of God is freely likened to a temple and nowhere more freely than in craft ceremonies; and these further instruct us that it ought to be the freemason's ideal to be built up in that temple as a living stone.

The apostle Peter, whose very name is the synonym for a rock, gives a new turn to the symbolism, when he says :-

Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue,
and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance,
and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness,
and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly
kindness charity. (2 Peter i. 5v.)

This is his definition of the erection of a perfect character, which he likens to a seven-storey house. The foundation stone is faith, and it is not difficult to see the applicability of the symbolism. The root or foundation of every man's character must be his convictions. Now the foundation stone is first of all well and truly laid on bed rock if possible, and thereafter is hidden out of sight, never again to be disturbed or even inspected. And so a man's convictions ought never to be matters of question, or even to come out into the open. The world is not concerned with them, but only with that which is erected thereon, and so, little by little, character is formed, culminating in that which is the coping stone of all character - charity. (Hence again the wisdom of that part of the charge which forbids us to discuss politics and religion.)

Now we will consider the materials to be used in building our individual temples. These are stone, iron, silver, gold, brass, and wood.

We are all of us conversant with the morals to be drawn from our various working tools, jewels, columns, rough and perfect ashlar, etc. In our every day speech we make use of correspondences when we speak of a man. Of one, we say that he is a "white man", of others, a sneak (or snake), a donkey or an ass, a bear, a lion (or lion hearted), a vulture, or a dog. The latter may have a good or a bad or even a jocular allusion. We know at once what is meant. We refer also to some men as "pillars" of society, of the state, or of the church. We say also that so-and-so is sure to support this or that proposition.

A square man is a man who gives a square deal. In shape or form the man is not square, but when we speak of him in this way we know that he is one who acts "on the square" - who gives an honest deal, and can be trusted accordingly. We may even refer to him as an upright man; although physically he may be very much out of plumb.

Similarly, throughout the inspired books of the V.S.L. we find words and phrases that can be similarly applied and understood. We all appreciate that gold, pearls, and precious stones must have a good signification of the highest importance. The streets of the new Jerusalem are of pure gold, clear as crystal: each gate a single pearl: and so on. Almost every article there is said to be of gold. Evidently the perfection of goodness. Garments are white - evidence of purity. Now unhewn rock or virgin stone corresponds to truth, which as you know is fixed and unalterable, although our view of it may be from perhaps one angle only. With our tools of iron, our logical reasoning power developed and improved by our education, we may take our rough block from the quarry of truth, and shape it (often for our own ends) and make of it the foundation of our own life and character.

Does it matter very seriously if we fail to see and to comprehend all that is said and written about the eternal rocks, and how these may be quarried and brought to use? We can still maintain our interest, and bring our own problems, our rough ashlar, to the master for his advice.

He holds and controls the tools to check our work, and has been given the seat of wisdom, the chair of King Solomon, for the very purpose of helping us.

I have purposely referred to rock and stone in the first instance because these correspond to natural truth, the very foundation of all our knowledge. The age of some rock may be thousands, perhaps millions, of years. Virgin stone corresponds to natural truth. The truth relating to wireless, cancer, radium, astronomy, geology, and much more, has always existed, but man has had to "dig" it out (as we say) for himself over the ages, before he could apply it or make use of it. In his search and research he has used his chisel and other tools of iron (the advantages of education - his reasoning powers). Afterwards, when the discovered truth became known, or made clear, or was finally shaped, the tools used in discovery and preparation were no longer required in putting such truth to use. Hence no sound of tools.

How very slowly the truth has emerged, and how often there has been only a veiled appearance for a long time. Similarly, how far has our knowledge advanced of the virgin stone or rocks of the earth? Our working of quarries on the Malvern hills are merely scars compared with the millions of tons that remain hidden from view. Quite recently we were told of an estimated quantity of 500 million tons of iron ore that is to be converted in the midlands and at the very point at which it is to be gotten. Discovery follows discovery, even in this small country; and yet we are part only of one small earth.

How vast, therefore, must be the untold wealth or truth of the universe. We have scarcely scratched the surface, physically, over some thousands of years; and this fact should help us to appreciate, therefore, how much more of truth remains hidden and veiled from our view. It is there to be sought after for thousands of years to come. Cooperatively, it is easy neither to quarry nor to shape, and in this respect its correspondence to natural truth is most evident.

Iron is another form of correspondence of truth. It corresponds to truth from reasoning - from logical reasoning. The hardness and even the original form of the rock-like ore has been changed by blasting, crushing, and smelting, back to molten form, followed by cleansing; and is then hammered into forms of usefulness for our many purposes. In our every day language we speak of hammering out the truth of a matter. Actually we do more than that. We try out the matter in ways similar to the blasting, crushing, smelting, and cleansing, so as to eliminate all falsities and inaccuracies.

The highest form of truth is represented by silver. Silver corresponds to truth from love. Our thoughts, both silent and expressed, are said to be "silver": we also say, if speech is silver, silence is gold. (The psalmist - Try me as silver is tried - by fire.)

We have thus dealt very briefly with three forms of truth represented in the V.S.L. by stone, iron, and silver.

Next let us deal with three forms of love or goodness, that is, as represented by gold, brass, and wood.

Gold corresponds to obedience from love or goodness. There is a quietness about it, dignity, and solidity. It too has passed through the flames to refinement.

Brass - natural good, hard and practical, to be found in our every day lives. It shouts, sometimes, but ought not to do so.

Wood corresponds to good done to achieve fame, merit, or the kingdom of heaven.

The goodness and truth as just mentioned may be divided into three stages, namely -

Our first stage. We work in wood and stone, that is, we work to win prizes, or from self interest.

Our second stage. We work in brass and iron, that is, we penetrate into the reason of things; we do good from judgment. Truth is rationally thought out.

Our third stage. We enter the religious life, that is, we require gold and silver and work in them.
Our work is gold.
Our thoughts are silver.

And now that we have collected and examined briefly this vast heap of building materials, what are we going to do with them. The whole is almost useless unless and until brought together in correct proportions. We find no directions whatsoever as to the use of mortar, cement, or any other type of binding material so far as this relates to the temple of Solomon, but in connection with the first tabernacle we have the command of Moses "And all the pins thereof, and all the pins of the court, shall be of brass".

For "pins" I think we may read "nails"; and then again, it seems to me that "we come down to brass tacks" or the things that really matter.

Nails or pins are necessary for all types of building, whether house, shed, or church. The safety of the structure depends on the various materials being securely held together; and if the pins fail we soon have a ruin.

It is equally true when we regard the human heart as a temple of love. We have seen that brass corresponds to natural good - hard and practical. Small acts of natural good are essential in our every day life, and these are the pins of brass, the brass tacks if you like. A good builder sees to it that his nails are not only well placed, but are hidden from view. It is when so hidden that they are doing most good. Similarly, it must be so with us. Each little act of kindness should be hidden away. The good acts of life must be performed in secret as far as possible, and not done at the street corners to be seen of men.

The plates of gold upon the altar needed pins of brass to hold them in position. Our love to the Lord must be secured by acts of service to our fellow men.

The silver coverings of the pillars of our temple, (or those wonderful truths we like to contemplate), will surely loosen or fall away if the acts of service - the brass pins - are missing.

Just as nails of gold or of silver would be useless as nails, so love, goodness, and truth, must ultimate themselves in good deeds.

The very existence of a heaven depends on use. This is more easily seen if we consider our love of a friend or relative. The more intense the love, the greater the willingness to perform acts of service, however lowly, to shew and sustain that love.

It is reported that a negro, who was liberated by the President Lincoln, so loved the man that he offered to black his boots every morning to shew that love. A brass nail supporting golden love.

One peculiarity of brass is that it soon tarnishes. Our natural good calls for constant attention and to be kept in use. We must not rest on our oars, relying on good done in the past, but come down to every day acts of service - to brass tacks. However humble our work may be, if done in the right spirit, we are driving home the brass nails that make the building secure for its higher uses. There can be no excuse, however, for our failure to understand and to use the brass tacks. Daily opportunities will occur, and sometimes the nails will be used in conjunction with wood, or it may be gold, or both. And so we may realise the promise to be found in the V.S.L.

"For brass I will bring gold - - "

That is from lowly services here we shall be called to more exalted use in the kingdom of love, signified by gold.

Conclusion.

Please do not regard or attempt to regard this endeavour on my part to entertain you as an insinuation, as a mounting of the pulpit (which we do not possess), or as an unwarranted enlargement of my office as Chaplain to "preach". We may possess a beautiful orchard, or we may "find" a delightful growth of say ripe blackberries. Either or both provide a feast for our eyes, but it is when the crop is gathered and a good selection is placed before us with an invitation to "carry on" that we can appreciate the fruit to the full. In much the same way, it has been my endeavour to collect such of the ripe fruit as lay within my vision and reach, and to place it before you in the hope that it will appeal to your palate, will not cause indigestion, but will, may be, stimulate the search for finer specimens undoubtedly hidden away and to be discovered by any one of us.

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