Knights of Light Education Series

The Emblems of a Master Mason

by Todd Connor

Recall for a moment this moment in your life: It's been several months (or more) since you set forth on your Masonic journey and you're finally just about done with the Degrees of the Symbolic Lodge. You've just been raised to the Sublime Degree and it's been a long night. You're tired. But wait – here comes some well-practiced Brother to impart unto you the lecture of the Degree. . You struggle to maintain your attention while this Brother explains in painfully acute detail exactly what you've just experienced, and the significance of the drama. Just as you think you're about done, he then proceeds to explain the Third Class of Emblems: The Three Steps, Pot of Incense, Beehive, Book of Constitutions Guarded by the Tyler's Sword, Sword pointing to a Naked Heart, All-seeing Eye, Anchor and Ark, Forty-Seventh Problem of Euclid, Hour Glass and Scythe. Unless your lecturer recited the Monitor's long form of this portion of the lecture, each of these emblems were ascribed a simplistic explanation of their significance which may have seemed utterly pedantic and obscure. Often the new Master Mason then proceeds to forget these emblems immediately upon commencement of his final catechism practices. However, these emblems are vessels for many of the deeper truths that are encased within the Master Mason Degree. Let's take a brief walk through these emblems once more and perhaps excite your intellect.

The Three Steps

We are told that the Three Steps allude to youth, manhood and age. The longer form connects this allusion to the Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft and Master Mason Degrees. I encourage you to dig a little bit into this emblem on your own. Maybe you'll find other applications of three similar insignias. I'll get you started on that: Father, Son,

Holy Spirit. Osiris, Isis, Horus. You might even find correspondence to the Monument displayed in all well-furnished Lodges.

The Pot of Incense

The Pot of Incense is described as "an emblem of a pure heart." How useful is that explanation? It may make more sense when reflecting back thousands of years ago, when Ancient priests would offer burnt offerings of animal flesh to God. The expectation was that the Divine, being of an etheric body, could not partake of solid food, but rather could receive only the essence of the gift by way of the smoke produced by the burning of the sacrifice. This practice later matured into the use of incense offered as a gift to the Divine, and the thoughts of burning incense should instill a sense of reverence and gratitude for the manifold blessings of God. The underlying notion of this being that, as Masons, we are admonished to offer our devotions to the Divine in spirit when reminded of this emblem.

The Beehive

In the lecture, the Beehive is simply referred to as "an emblem of industry," but this emblem barely illumines the importance behind it. It is true that the "busy bee" is widely accepted as one of the hardest working creatures in the animal kingdom. Not forgetting that they are aerodynamically incapable of flight due to their bodily proportions, these amazing creatures are actually performing miracles every day in merely engaging in their usual work.

Carrying the importance of labor to its significance in Masonry - the dignity of work may be compared to a pure worship of God. The Scottish Rite, in fact, has an entire Degree dedicated to the dignity of work, named The Knight of Knight of the Royal Axe, or Prince of Libanus. In Albert Pike's lectures in Morals and Dogma on this, the 22nd

Degree, he quotes a maxim of ancient monks, “Labore est orare,” which translates as “To work is to pray.” He states that “there is a perennial nobleness and even sacredness in work,” and emphasizes the importance of service. He also asserts that labor ennobles man and “is Heaven’s great ordinance for human improvement.”

Each of us sometimes look at work as a necessary, grueling and toilsome drudgery, or take for granted the satisfaction of a job well-done. Reflect for a moment, however, that mankind grows most when faced with difficult challenges. Man, after all, does not learn from joy, and the fruits of labor are far sweeter than those whose value is unappreciated. History is filled with examples of how mankind has worked to build his greatest creations and overcome the greatest challenges, so the explanation of the Beehive as “an emblem of industry,” does not do justice to the miracle that is the bee.

The Book of Constitutions Guarded by the Tyler’s Sword

We are admonished with the Book of Constitutions Guarded by the Tyler’s Sword to be watchful and guarded in our thoughts, words and actions. This explanation is actually quite straight forward, however, this simple admonition may not provide as much clarity as may be desired. As Masons, we are not permitted to discuss matters of religion or politics within Lodge, and in our Entered Apprentice Degree, we are prohibited from a litany of means to unlawfully communicate the secrets of Masonry. Why is this?

In the case of the former, it is obvious that our fraternity is predicated on maintaining peace and harmony with our brethren, so careless commentary that may raise negative feelings should be avoided, lest we disrupt the harmony of the Lodge. Concerning the latter: Masons, when compared to non-Masons, often look more deeply at the mysteries of our Creator, Creation and the role that we play in the Book of Life. Our studies may incorporate viewpoints of our Brothers who subscribe to different religious beliefs. The things that we may discover in our meditations may not be suited or compatible with

what others may believe, both profane and even within Masonry. What may be true in our heart may be a cause for calumny in others, and thus caution should be applied in our words and actions in order to maintain respect for all concerned. You may observe other instances of symbols admonishing discretion and secrecy in your continuing Masonic travels.

The Sword Pointing to a Naked Heart and the All-Seeing Eye

According to what you were told in the lecture, the Sword Pointing to a Naked Heart alludes to justice and that the All-Seeing Eye sees all within the recesses of the human heart. The Monitor's long form of this segment seems to more suitably embellish these as it states:

"The Sword pointing to a Naked Heart demonstrates that justice will sooner or later overtake us; and although our thoughts, words
and actions may be hidden from the eyes of man, yet that All-Seeing Eye whom the Sun, Moon and Stars obey, and under whose
watchful care even Comets perform their stupendous revolutions, pervades the inmost recesses of the human heart, and will reward
us according to our merits"

The Anchor and the Ark

The Anchor and the Ark are described as emblems of a well-grounded hope and a well-spent life. You may have welcomed this simplistic brevity in the midst of the seemingly endless night of the Master Mason Degree through which you were passing. However, the Monitor's long form of this emblem nicely expands on this explanation with a more inspirational passage stating that, "They are emblematical of that Divine ark which safely wafts us over this tempestuous sea of troubles, and that anchor which shall safely

moor us in a peaceful harbor where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary shall find rest."

The Forty-Seventh Problem of Euclid

The Forty-Seventh Problem of Euclid is perhaps the least understood emblem of Symbolic Lodge Masonry. The short lecture simply calls it an emblem of education. Even the long form reveals only a little snippet of the background of the historical mathematician Pythagoras and the excitement he felt when he discovered the significance of the proportions of the right triangle.

(Not many people realize that Pythagoras was not Greek but rather an American Indian…)
Joking aside - you perhaps know that a right triangle exhibits the following characteristic: the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the square of the other two sides. This relationship is important to Operative Masons, as it enables them to draw square corners, essential to a sound building. In addition, the right triangle allows the Operative Mason to compute and measure Phi, otherwise known as the Golden Ratio. Phi or the Golden Ratio is an irrational number of approximately 1.618. This simple proportion is credited with enhancing the medieval cathedrals with perfect perspectives in the ordering and placement of buildings' features. Collectively, these revelations permitted Operative Masons to construct some of the most beautiful and timeless monuments to God that the Earth has seen.

Speculative Masonry popularly represents the right triangle with proportions of 3, 4 and 5; to wit: the squares of 3 and 4 are 9 and 16, respectively and their sum equals 25 – which is equivalent to the square of 5.

I assure you, my Brothers – there is more significance to a Speculative Mason of the 3-4-5 right triangle than meets the eye here. If you have the appetite to follow up on this, I encourage you to read Albert Pike's book Esoterika, where you will find a very eloquently articulated explanation of this symbology.

The Hour Glass and The Scythe

And finally, The Hour Glass is described as an emblem of human life and the Scythe an emblem of Time in the short lecture, but I feel that the long version induces a great deal more contemplation. Listen:

"*Behold! How swiftly and rapidly our lives are drawing to a close. We cannot, without astonishment, behold the little particles, which*

are contained within this machine, how they pass away almost imperceptibly, and yet to our surprise, in the short space of an hour,

they are all exhausted. Thus wastes man! Today he puts forth the tender leaves of hope; tomorrow, blossoms and bears his blushing

honors thick upon him; the next day comes a frost, which nips the shoot, and when he thinks his greatness is still aspiring, he falls,

like autumn leaves, to enrich our mother earth."

The explanation of the Scythe continues that it is:

"an emblem of time, which cuts the brittle thread of life and launches us into eternity. Behold! what havoc the scythe of time makes

among the human race; if, by chance, we should escape the numerous evils incident to childhood and youth, and with health and vigor

arrive to the years of manhood; yet, withal, we must soon be cut down by the all-devouring scythe of time, and be gathered into the land

where our fathers have gone before us."

Together, these two emblems remind us of how fleeting our time on this Earth is and admonishes us to make the most of that time.

In conclusion, I encourage all of you to pick up your Monitor and read the long form lecture on the Third Class of Emblems from page 119. Meditate on these. You'll surely develop a deeper appreciation for these emblems and maybe you'll become equipped to uncover some of their deeper meanings that may yet be hidden from your view.

i Albert Pike, Morals and Dogma of the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, 2nd annotated edition, 2nd printing,

(Supreme Council AASR SMJ, Washington, DC, 2016), 415-424

ii Grand Lodge F & A M of Florida, Florida Masonic Code, first edition, correction 5, (Grand Lodge of Florida, Jacksonville, FL, 2015), 121