

THE FURNITURE OF THE LODGE.

(By V.W. Bro. Rev. David Calder, P.G.C., P.G.Lee.)

I consider it an honour, Worshipful Master, that you have assigned to me as my subject for this evening "The Furniture of the Lodge." Any paper that must of necessity deal largely with the Sacred Volume is much to my liking. The Lecture on the First Tracing Board states that the Furniture of the Lodge is the Volume of the Sacred Law, the Square, and the Compasses. The same lecture states also that we have in our Lodges, Furniture, Ornaments and Jewels, It will not therefore be out of place if, first of all, we see how these three are related.

Furniture, says my dictionary, is whatever must be supplied to a house, a room, or the like, to make it habitable, convenient, or agreeable—its necessary appendages.

An Ornament, says the same authority, is that which adds grace and beauty—an embellishment or decoration; that which being added to another thing renders it more beautiful to the eye.

A jewel is an object regarded with special affection, or that is very highly valued; anything of exceeding value or excellence.

Much as we value ornaments and jewels, we could do without them—which, however, God forbid; but furniture stands as essential and requisite, both to the Lodge, and, according to our symbolic teaching, to life. Let it ever be asserted, therefore, that the Masonic Craft under all circumstances puts the Sacred Volume in the forefront as necessary to the well-being both of the Lodge as a whole and to the life of each and every one of its members. The square and compasses also are constantly in evidence as setting forth to ourselves and to the world the things we value as we value life itself; while their accepted position in our temples shows that what they represent depends upon, and is the natural consequence of, the teaching of the Holy Book.

The Sacred Volume is described in our teachings as the Divine Tracing Board whereon are set forth the lines and proportions of a true human life in its relation to God, to our neighbour, and to ourselves. Thereon also are drawn the various outline pictures to which the building of a perfect life should conform.

The Square is ever significant of the man himself. Built upon the teachings contained in the Holy Book, the man evidences a character in which square conduct, right living and correct thinking are the resultant qualifications. He is "a square man" in the highest sense, and—what a man be is!

The Compasses are an object lesson of the man in action. One point is the man as centre, while the other marks out the circle of his life contacts, and the possible reach of his impacts and influence. His powers reach out in all directions; and what he is, changes, according to the measure of his strength, the whole circle of his particular world. Very specially the compasses represent the Grand Master of the Universe, because He alone is equal in all His powers, going out in every direction with a perfect penetration of gracious and stimulating Eternity of Life,

As this is a Lodge of Research, so, in the spirit of the Lodge, let us now ask: "Just what is the first great item of our furniture, the Volume of Sacred Law?"

It had its origin with the ancient Hebrew Race, and is indeed the great classical literature of that people, having grown to be what it is today, as grows the classical literature of any one of the greater nations. As the great nations of the world, under the hand of the Architect of the Universe, have each contributed something to the general life of the world's people, so the contribution of the Ancient Hebrews was a knowledge of God Himself, both as the Architect of the World, and as the supreme Designer of the life of man.

I am sure that each of us here present has his shelf of books. They have been gathered over a lifetime, and represent to us our personal choice of the best literature that has come to our hand. The light ephemeral literature we have cast aside and possibly burnt; but, here a little, there a little, we have gathered and kept what appealed to our inner selves as being worthy of a permanent place among the valued possessions of our

life. It may be a few hundred books, possibly it is only fifty; but we prize them and would not dispose of them for money to our best friends. They are the cream of our reading; while the skim milk, although good in its own little way, we have cast aside, and most of it we have forgotten.

Such a choice of books, as made by each of five hundred thoughtful men, would be worthy of special examination. If we were to gather the titles together, and select the fifty most often present; and then multiply the action over all the groups of readers of our English speaking peoples from all the centuries; and finally, from them all, determine the fifty most highly valued of all our books, we would have the classics of our people—our English Classics. The work has not been done by a committee, a national council, or conference, but by such a process as we have described—by such a process going on automatically throughout the ages. It was thus our Classics came to be acknowledged as they are today. Thus also have come the Classics of Ancient Rome, of Greece, and of the Hebrew People.

If, however, our classical literatures have been chosen or selected in this way, it was not thus that they came into being. The process we have described has determined what are the greatest of the great books; but the writing of them has been another story. Their writers were men of worth, who set forth, as they have done, something of the very genius of their race. They had had a spirit of greatness "breathed" into them by a Divine process or method that is not so easily explained. The same Divine process has determined the peculiar genius of each one of the greatest peoples, so that their classical literatures differ vitally the one from the other. Think for even a moment of the terms English Classic, Latin Classic, Greek Classic, Hebrew Literature, and there arises a characteristic idea that clings naturally to each. There is a Divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them as we will—and, as my old theological professor once said, in his own decided voice. "God abhors duplicates." I shall not venture to epitomise the English Classics in any one sentence—to do so would be dangerous to my reputation—but the term Roman or Latin Classics brings to us the thought of Law and Organisation. and Greek the thought of Art and Philosophy, while the Ancient Hebrew writer was a specialist in the knowledge of the Eternal God. They were theologians in the very highest sense of the term.

As we examine this literature more carefully we are at once struck by its variety. It comes to us from a period ranging over about 1500 years; there are sixty-six books. in all, and according to the conservative computation, they come from forty different writers. They are in three very old languages—the Hebrew, Aramaic and a colloquial Greek of a well-known period. The authors include the prophet, the king, the shepherd and the fisherman; and they belonged to the palace, the prison and the open air. Their subject matter is of universal interest, being history, poetry, hymns, prophecy or sermons, prayers, wise sayings, and even human love—as in the book of Ruth. They set forth the deeds of heroes, and the faults as well as the good qualities of men and women. They tell of the love of man for man, of woman for woman, and of the true man for his chosen mate in a true woman, and that love in its return. They set forth the codes of honour, of right living, and of excellent business. In matter of fact, these writers have given us the accepted variety of literature we should expect from a truly outstanding people; and yet withal, it everywhere breathes an atmosphere of the knowledge of God in Whose Presence, and under Whose all-Seeing Eye they lived, moved, and had their being.

It is natural, therefore, that when these sixty-six books are brought together in one volume, which we call our Bible, we at once recognise its unity. It has one subject matter, one that is treated in a manner that is full, rich, inspiring, and of universal appeal. Its subject matter may be called "The curse of sin, its origin, its history, and its cure." In simple story form it declares the origin of sin in that it is disobedience to the Deity; its history in that, as a fever in the human body, it infected and affected the whole of the human race; and its cure, which is yet to come, in that Bright Morning Star whose rising brings peace and tranquillity to the faithful and obedient of the human race. Finally it gives a picture of a future day wherein there will be no trace of the curse; but men will brothers be, and the "earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord; as the waters, cover the sea." (Habakkuk 2 : 4.)

Our English Bible, or, as we call it, the Volume of Sacred Law, is a translation of these ancient Hebrew Classics, the writers of which were neither English nor European, but Asian. It was brought to us because of its acknowledged value, and was soon recognised by our forefathers as of supreme worth. It has continued

with us until now it is acknowledged to be the first Classic of our English language. Indeed, it is justly claimed that it has added a new beauty and dignity to our mother tongue. As a master musician discovers to us the latent beauty in some old instrument on which he is playing, so this book has created much of the strength and richness of our language, and has sweetened its tone and power. In short, we discovered a good thing, and we made it our own; not because it was seen to be a Jewel of rarest worth, or an Ornament wherewith to decorate the mind of the nation, but as Furniture that is essential to the dwelling wherein we can profitably reside in the fullness and joy of life.

We believe that the Eternal God reveals Himself to us in its pages by a method that we call "Inspiration." What is this inspiration of Holy Scripture, and wherein does it consist? The Book gives its own answer to this most pertinent question. A later writer in the Book itself, says of the earliest ones that "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost"-2 Peter 1: 2. This writer also refers to these ancients as searching what the spirit which was in them did signify of the truths with which they dealt. Again, a writer says "Believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits whether they are of God"-1 John 4: 1. Thus they were constantly on guard against any personal hallucinations, against what was noisy, fanciful or bizarre, against any exaggerations. To them the voice of God came, to give it the unique phrase that is in Dr. Moffatt's translation, as "the breath of a light whisper." One of the most dramatic passages of Scripture is in the story of Elijah receiving a message from the Lord (see I Kings, 19: 11-12). His description is startling in its power. Listen to it: "The Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice." Moffatt translates the last phrase as: "After the fire came the breath of a light whisper." As these men of old tuned themselves to the finest and best by a great quietness of soul, the voice breathed into them a whisper of purest truth. That voice still comes to men in their greatest moments, and the message is a guide unto truth. It is well if our lives are furnished with a knowledge of the pages of this our greatest Book—so furnished that we hear its whisper, and go forth to obey its truth.

The Book therefore stands today not because it is ancient, or because it was said to have come down from heaven, but because of its own inherent beauty of truth and wisdom, because the reading of it causes a constant conviction that it cannot be other than a Divine revelation to men of the way to a high and holy manner of life and living. Good wine needs no bush. A diamond justifies itself by the flash of its own clear, transparent beauty.

In the time that is now at my disposal I can give but a brief statement on what is called the "Canon of Holy Scripture." The word "Canon" is derived from a Hebrew and Greek word meaning a cane or reed. It denotes something that is straight, something that is according to rule and measurement—hence it is that which has a right to its place as containing the revelation of the Divine Will - a right that seems to have first approved itself, in the matter of the oldest books, to Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra dates back to the middle of the fifth century B.C., and constant Jewish tradition connects his name with the collecting and editing of the Old Testament in the years immediately following the return from the Babylonian Exile. The final completion of the Canon would belong to a later generation; but Ezra seems to have given it the general shape that we have today. Nehemiah, who appeared fourteen years later than Ezra, in the book that carries his name, describes a remarkable scene, when "The Law" was read aloud by Ezra and his assistants. Nehemiah goes on to tell of the religious awakening that followed.

The oldest known translation of the Hebrew Scriptures was into the Greek Language, and this has come to be known as "The Septuagint." Its origin is a little obscure; but it is established that the version was made in Alexandria, and that it dates back to the beginning of the second century B.C. The Septuagint contains the thirty-nine books of our Old Testament, and also fourteen other books, written originally in the Greek, and known to us as the Apocrypha. These later books are not universally accepted as true Holy Scriptures. The New Testament Canon, according to historical evidence, was substantially in its present form about the middle of the second century A.D.

The name "Bible," which comes from the Greek word "Biblia," meaning "books," came into use in the fifth century; and our modern title of "Bible" was adopted by Wycliffe, and soon came into general use. The

ancient Jews divided the Old Testament into sections suitable for reading in their synagogue services; and our modern system of dividing each book of the Bible into chapters was introduced by one of the Cardinals about the year 1250 A.D., while the system of verses was introduced in the year 1551 A.D. The divisions, both into chapters and verses, are not always wise; but as they are useful, they have been, and will continue to be, observed.

It is not an easy task to deal adequately with the two remaining items of furniture—the Square and the Compasses. Everyday things, and things common to the life of many ages, are like the returning seasons. They are well known, and are taken for granted; but they are none the less alluring. We do not always rightly assess their value; but even to imagine their non-return is tragedy itself.

The Square and Compasses are generally together as symbols, and their mystical significance ranges from the ideas set forth in the dictum—"To square our actions, and to keep them within due boundS," to the thought of, "The Perfection of the Diety in His justice, infinite widom, and compassion." Very rightly do we find that even the higher degrees of F.M. retain these essential items of furniture. The Square, as used in our Lodges, should have its arms of equal length, and be without niche markings, for it is the trying square of the working mason, by which he tests the accuracy of the stone he is working. Symbolically it teaches that morality, truthfulness, and perfect honesty or square dealing are essential to all true life and action.

While, however, the true mason's trying square has legs of equal length, it was only natural that once the instrument was established as an important item of our furniture, it should appear in slightly altered forms, by varying the length of its legs. The square with legs in the proportion of 3 and 4, and therefore 5 between the points, found considerable favour. Scientific minds also played with the various possible methods of finding the true square. At least two of these have been established. A perfect square can be found by describing a circle and drawing the line of its diameter. The two lines then drawn from the end of the diameter to any point in the circumference must contain an angle of ninety degrees. This is established in Euclid. The second method is that of making a triange whose sides are in the proportions 3, 4, and 5, and in which the angle subtending the longest side must contain ninety degrees. A very interesting scientific study is to be found in the Transactions of the Leicester Research Lodge, volume 7, wherein it is shown that the figures 3, 4, and 5, of interesting mathematical relationship, have also an important inter-relationship in music. From these figures every ratio in music can be deduced. May I commend that article to any brother who is also a student of musical harmony.

Meditative study has also helped to find in the square new illustrations for our moral teaching, and Bro. W. H. Rylands in the A.Q.C., Vol. 13, page 28, deduces from the fact that the square has its points properly disposed towards each other, that the quality in the Mason which we car "square," properly disposes the soul, and establishes peace of mind. The whole duty of a man's life is realised in love to God and love to his neighbour. It is a three-pointed relationship that is perfect in proportion and rich in its results.

A little time spent in browsing in our Lodge Library has been profitable, chiefly because of the excellent system of indexing, which was the work of our present librarian to whom we owe a full measure of gratitude; but I failed to find much about the compasses. An interesting question appears to have been raised in the "New Zealand Craftsman" some years ago as to the plural form of the word compasses. It was then shown that the present form originated in the year 1555, probably to avoid confusion with the name of the mariner's compass. It was also shown that many tools with duplicate working parts have come to have plural names, i.e., pliers, scissors, etc.

Of meditative teaching on both square and compasses our Library possesses some fine examples. It is not necessary to repeat them here.

Finally, brethren, may I say that the furniture of our Lodges gives us symbols of such exceeding worth that frequent contemplation of their moral teaching will furnish us in mind and heart to such purpose that when the Eternal Square is laid against the spiritual stones that are our individual lives, we shall receive the approbation of the Great Architect of the Universe, Whom we have sought to serve.