

THE PILLARS OF FREEMASONRY

THEIR ORIGIN AND MEANING

BY

WILLIAM HARVEY, J.P.

Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland; Author of " The Complete Manual of Freemasonry " ; Provincial Grand Bard of Forfarshire ; M.M., Stirling Royal Arch, No. 76 ; Hon. Mem. Caledonian Dundee, No. 254; R.W.M., Progress Dundee, No. 967, 1914-16 ; Charter Mem. Dundee St Mary, No. 1149 ; W. sub. M. Ubique, Dundee, No. 1192 ; Hon. Mem. No. 6 R.A. ; Hon, Mem. No. 164 R.A. ; P.H. No. 271 R.A. ; Hon. Mem. No. 416 R.A. ; Founder & First Principal No. 421 R.A. ; Hon. Mem. No. 423 R.A. ; Founder No. 499 R.A.

DUNDEE:
T. M. SPARKS, CROSSWELL WORKS

1944

PREFACE

Brethren who have studied and adopted my Lecture on " The Third Degree: its Ornaments and Emblems," have been kind enough to suggest that I might prepare a Lecture that could be suitably introduced into the ceremonial of the Second Degree. The conventional lecture which finds a place in most " Rituals " leaves very much to be desired. It is often obviously inaccurate in matters of alleged fact, and bristles with anachronisms. Enthusiasts have sought to excuse these by saying that the Lecture presents an allegory, but no satisfactory explanation of the allegory is forthcoming.

In response to many requests I have prepared the following pages in which I concentrate attention upon the Pillars, their origin and meaning, and their significance, as emblems. I hope the Lecture will be found of value. I could not wish for anything better than that it might receive a welcome similar to that accorded to " The Third Degree."

WILLIAM HARVEY.

4 GOWRIE STREET,
DUNDEE.

NOTE TO SECOND EDITION

I am deeply gratified by the cordial reception that has been given to this booklet, and would thank the many correspondents who have written to me in commendation of it. I hope it will continue to prove useful.

WILLIAM HARVEY.

THE PILLARS OF FREEMASONRY

The uninitiated of the outer world who enter the precincts of a Masonic Lodge, or casts his curious eye upon the Diploma of a Master Mason, cannot fail to notice the twin pillars that form so prominent a feature in the decoration of the one and in the design of the other. Doubtless he contents himself with the reflection that, as the fraternity is intimately identified with building construction, these pillars are fit and proper symbols of Freemasonry. And if he cares to enquire he will find that his reflection is quite in keeping with the teachings of the Craft.

Illustrations of Freemasonry furnish pillars of many designs - from the simple Doric to the richly-decorated Composite - all set down according to the whim of the artist. And it is safe to say that, in general, they bear little resemblance to the pillars that stood at what is conventionally called "the porch or entrance to King Solomon's Temple." Whatever order of Architecture the design may represent, the pillars, as a rule, support massive globes which, in the language that belongs to modern Freemasonry, are said to represent the terrestrial and celestial spheres, and which are invariably decorated with geographical and stellar maps. As a rule, the pillars are shewn as placed at either side of the entrance way, and forming part of the building, but this very probably is incorrect, as the general view of Bible students and archaeologists is that the pillars were structurally independent of the Temple porch, and stood free in front of it, most likely on plinths or bases. Such free-standing pillars were a notable feature of temples in Western Asia, according to the writings of Greek authors, whose statements are borne out by designs on contemporary coins. Further proof of a conclusive character so far as these particular columns are concerned was furnished by an ancient glass dish which was discovered at Rome in 1882, and which presented an illustration of Solomon's Temple with the pillars standing free from the building and flanking the porch in the manner indicated.

The pillars which were brass or bronze-most probably the latter-may be regarded as the highest expression of the art of their author, Hiram, "the half-Tyrian copper worker, whom Solomon fetched from Tyre to do foundry work for him." The stranger, we are told in the seventh chapter of the First Book of Kings, was "filled with wisdom and understanding and cunning, to work all works in brass "; and additional information concerning his artistic abilities may be gleaned from the second chapter of the Second Book of Chronicles, where it is stated that he was "skilful to work in gold, and in silver, in brass, in iron, in stone, and in timber, in purple, in blue, and in fine linen, and

in crimson." Building upon that foundation, Freemasons have not hesitated to claim him as "the principal Architect of the Temple," and have grouped his name with those of Hiram, King of Tyre, and Solomon, King of Israel, in a trinity of genius and piety.

The pillars are described in the seventh chapter of the First Book of Kings, but scholars agree that the description is exceedingly confused and corrupt. By collating the references there, however, with allusions in other books of the Old Testament, students' arrive at what they regard as a fairly accurate account of the columns. Accordingly they tell us that Hiram "cast the two pillars of bronze for the porch of the temple; 18 cubits was the height of the one pillar, and a line of 12 cubits could compass it about, and its thickness was 4 finger breadths (for it was) hollow. And the second pillar was similar. And he made two chapters [i.e., capitals] of cast bronze for the tops of the pillars: the height of the one chapter was 5 cubits, and the height of the other chapter was 5 cubits. And he made two sets of network to cover the chapters which were. upon the tops of the pillars, a network for the one chapter, and a network for the second chapter. And he made the pomegranates; and two rows of pomegranates in bronze were upon the one network, and the pomegranates were 200, round about upon the one chapter, and so he did for the second chapter. And upon the top of the pillars was lily-work: so was the work of the pillars finished." It is interesting to compare this description with that preserved by Josephus, the Jewish historian. He writes that, "Hiram made two hollow pillars, whose outsides were of brass, and the thickness of the brass was four fingers' breadth, and the height of the pillars was eighteen cubits, and their circumference twelve cubits; but there was cast with each of their chapters lily-work that stood upon the pillar, and it was elevated five cubits, round about which there was net-work, interwoven with small palms made of brass and covering the lilywork. To this also were hung two hundred pomegranates in two rows."

The pillars were cast in the plain of the Jordan, in the clay ground between Succoth and Zeredatha. This spot was about thirty-five miles north-east of Jerusalem, and the belief is that Hiram erected his foundry there on account of the fact that the clay which abounded in that locality was, by its great tenacity, peculiarly fitted for making moulds. Authority for this view is found in the 42nd verse of the 7th chapter of the First Book of Kings, and in the 17th verse of the 4th chapter of the Second Book of Chronicles, and further confirmation of the Masonic tradition is supplied by Morris in his work on "Freemasonry in the Holy Land." He says that one of his assistants discovered that the jewellers of Jerusalem at the present day use a

particular species of brown arenaceous clay in making moulds for casting small pieces of brass. On his inquiring whence this clay came, he was informed that it was got at " Seikoot, about two-days' journey north-east of Jerusalem."

The metal was of a thickness equal to three inches of our measure, and, taking the larger cubit of 20½ inches as a standard, the pillars reached to a height of about 31 feet, while in diameter they were about 6½ feet.

The details of the pillars fall naturally into four parts-the columns, the lily work, the capitals or chapters, and the ornamentation thereof. All authorities agree that the pillars were hollow, and a Masonic tradition - which, however, is generally regarded as a myth - alleges that they were so formed the better to serve as archives for the Craft, and that within them were deposited the constitutional rolls of the fraternity. At the junction of the pillar and the chapter, and springing out from the former, was a row of lily petals which, according to one account, " first spreading round the chapter, afterwards gently curved downwards towards the pillar, something like the acanthus leaves on the capital of a Corinthian column," and, Lightfoot gives a fuller description when he says, "at the head of the pillar, even at the setting on of the chapter, there was a curious and a large border or circle of lily-work, which stood out four cubits under the chapter, and then turned down, every lily or long tongue of brass, with a neat bending, and so seemed as a flowered crown to the head of the pillar, and as a curious garland whereon the chapter had its seat."

The lily-work supported the chapter with which each column was crowned. Reference has already been made to the fact that in Masonic illustrations the pillars are commonly represented as upholding spheres, and sometimes Freemasons teach that these globes " contained the maps and charts of the celestial and terrestrial bodies, denoting the universality of Masonry." All this is imagination. The capitals were not surmounted by spheres, but the capitals themselves appear from the reference in the seventh chapter of the First Book of Kings to have been globular or spheroidal in form. Lightfoot says the capital "was a huge, great oval . . . and did not only sit upon the head of the pillars, but also flowered or spread them, being large about, a great deal, than the pillars themselves." These capitals added 82 feet to the height of the columns, and thus the complete pillars rose to an altitude of roughly 40 feet.

The capitals were richly decorated, and the ornamentation was of a twofold character. About two-fifths of the distance from the bottom, or just below the most bulging part of the globular chapter, a tissue of net-work was carved, which extended over its whole upper surface. To the bottom of this net-work was suspended a series of fringes, and these again were festooned with two wreaths of bronze pomegranates. We gather from what is said in the 52nd chapter of Jeremiah that four of the pomegranates were fixed to the net-work and that the remaining ninety-six hung free.

Authorities are not agreed as to the purpose of these pillars. One view set forth-and it is regarded as entirely improbable by those who differ from it is that the pillars were huge candelabra or cressets in which " the suet of the sacrifices " was burned. Another view is that the pillars can be explained in terms of the astral mythology of Babylon. A third suggestion is that, as they were the work of a Phoenician artist, their meaning should be sought for by a reference to the similar pillars that were to be found in Phoenician temples. In this connection it is interesting to note that, according to Herodotus, the temple at Tyre, with which Hiram must have been familiar, contained two such pillars, one of emerald, and the other of fine gold. In primitive times pillars had been regarded as the abode of the Deity, and probably the standing stones all the world over are to be explained in some such way. As civilization advanced, however, the pillar ceased to become the abode but continued to be a symbol of the presence of God. It is not unlikely that Hiram, imbued with the religious beliefs of his native land, gave the pillars a place in his plan as conventional symbols of the God for whose worship the Temple of Solomon was designed.

Freemasons teach that the pillars were set up by the wise King as a memorial to the Children of Israel of the happy deliverance of their forefathers from their Egyptian bondage, and in commemoration of the Pillars of Fire and Cloud, which had two wonderful effects-the fire gave light to the Israelites during their escape from their Egyptian bondage; the cloud proved darkness to Pharaoh and his followers when they attempted to overtake the Hebrews. Such an event in the history of the race deserved ever to be kept before the eyes of the Jewish people, and Freemasons maintain that it was with this object in view that the Pillars were set up at the entrance to the Temple, since that was the most proper and conspicuous situation in which they might be observed by those who attended the ordinances of divine worship. It is thus seen that the teachings of the Craft are not out of harmony with the views attributed to Hiram. It is suggested that the Phoenician artist raised the pillars as symbols of Divine Majesty; the Freemason

regards them as memorials of the manifestations of Divine Providence as seen in the Pillars of Fire and Cloud.

We read in the seventh chapter of the First Book of Kings and again in the third chapter of the Second Book of Chronicles, that Hiram "set up the right pillar and called the name thereof Jachin; and he set up the left pillar, and called the name thereof Boaz." Why the pillars were so named remains one of the mysteries of Biblical antiquities; but Freemasonry has its own explanations. We learn from the seventeenth verse of the 24th chapter of the First Book of Chronicles that Jachin was the head of the twenty-first division of priests in the time of David, and Freemasonry says that the Pillar was named after Jachin, the assistant high priest who officiated at the dedication of the Temple. Boaz took its name from Boaz, the great-grandfather of King David. By some rabbis this Boaz is identified with the judge Ibzan of Bethlehem who is mentioned in the eighth verse of the twelfth chapter of Judges; and according to Jewish tradition he was the father of sixty children, all of whom died during his lifetime because he did not invite Manoah, Samson's father, to any of the marriage festivities in his house. Late in life he became the hero of the idyll of the harvest field in which Ruth the Moabitess figured. Boaz was eighty years of age when he married Ruth, who was forty. He died the day after the wedding, but the marriage did not remain childless. Ruth bore a son whose name was Obed, and who, according to the Old Testament, was the grandfather of David. Modern critics generally deny the historical value of the genealogy, but Masons accept the statement, and the controversy may safely be left as a nut for antiquaries to crack.

Our English Bible, in its marginal references, suggests renderings of the names of the Pillars, interpreting Jachin as meaning "he shall establish," and Boaz as meaning "in its strength." Bible students agree that these readings are very problematical, and give no help to a proper understanding of why the Pillars were so named. Freemasonry, incorporating them into its symbolic teaching, says that the two, when conjoined, refer to the stable or enduring quality of all things that belong to the eternal God, fortifying the whole with the phrase, "For God said, 'In Strength will I establish this mine house that it may stand forever.'" And there cannot be any doubt but that pillars of such magnitude could not fail to impress the minds of those who beheld them, alike by their massive proportions, their strength, and their beauty.

As symbols of these qualities they should still be potent with meaning for Freemasons.

The Network upon the capitals is emblematical of that Unity which should at all times characterise members of the Craft. As one mesh of the net is inwoven with another, so the threads of all our lives intertwine. No man liveth unto himself; and it is the duty of a brother to recognise the mutual responsibilities of life by extending help to those who are in need, sympathy to those who are in affliction, and counsel to those who depend upon him for guidance.

The Lilywork denotes Peace and Purity. The white lily is one of the flowers of the fields of Judea, and there are frequent references to it in the Bible as an emblem of purity. It was full of meaning to the ancients, and occurs all over the East; and indeed has been held in mysterious veneration by people of all nations and times. In the arms of France the three leaves of the lily mean Piety, Justice, and Charity, a trinity of characteristics that cannot fail to command the esteem of all good Masons. As a symbol of Purity it reminds us of that purity of life and action which should at all times distinguish us if we would be true to the tenets of our moral code. As a symbol of Peace, it denotes that Peace which, whether in the home, in the Lodge, or in the State, is best promoted by a faithful observance of the rights of others. Only thus may discord be banished from the home, enmity debarred from the Lodge, and war prevented from exciting the jealousies of nations and provoking men to massacre.

The Pomegranate from the exuberance of its seeds denotes Plenty. As an emblem it was highly esteemed by the nations of antiquity who attached some mystic signification to its fruit. It is believed to have been worshiped as a god by the Syrians of Damascus, and there was a temple on Mount Cassius (between Canaan and Egypt) in which there was an image of Jupiter with a pomegranate in his hand. To the modern Freemason it denotes that Plenty which is the fruit of a wise exercise of the gifts with which we have been endowed, and which, devoted with a single eye to the advancement of civilisation, may enable each of us to enter at last into the Eternal Silence, conscious that we have done what we could to raise mankind to a higher plane of moral and social life.

The conjoined names of the Pillars denote Stability - that stability of character and of purpose which should ever be apparent in the life of the Freemason who would stand fast in the faith. He must be stable in friendship, only thus may he enjoy and promote the privileges of brotherhood. He must be stable to withstand the assaults of evil, otherwise his character may be tarnished and his whole life laid in ruins. He must be stable in the defence of truth and honour so that

men, seeing him and testing him, may learn what Freemasonry is, and what are the great principles for which our system stands.

Some one has said that a Freemason's lodge is the universe, and that Jachin and Boaz are the two pillars that support and sustain it. It is a happy conceit, and from it one might argue that every Freemason is a pillar in the great temple of universal brotherhood. And, just as the strength of a chain is measured by its weakest link, so the stability of the Temple, is tested by the strength of the pillars which support it. Therefore, each craftsman should strive constantly to cultivate the wisdom of understanding a brother's wants, the strength of aiding a brother to bear the burden of life, and the beauty of a timely and discerning benevolence.

In all ages pillars have occupied a prominent place in the life and thought of nations. Herodotus tells us that the Egyptians erected their obelisks in honour of the sun, and that their pointed form was intended to represent his rays. Jacob set up a pillar at Bethel to memorialise his vision of the ladder that reached from earth to heaven; Joshua raised twelve pillars at Gilgal to perpetuate the memory of his miraculous crossing of the Jordan; Samuel erected a pillar between Mizpeh and Shem to record the defeat of the Philistines; and Absalom reared one in honour of himself. The Hebrews regarded them, too, as symbols of princes and nobles who were the pillars of the state. Thus, in the third verse of the eleventh Psalm, the passage which in our translation reads, "If the foundations be destroyed," is, in the original, "When the columns are overthrown," that is, when the firm supports of what is right and good have perished, " what can the righteous do?" Again, the tenth verse of the nineteenth chapter of Isaiah should, more accurately be rendered, "Her (Egypt's) columns are broken down," that is, the nobles of her State have been overthrown. And many other instances might be cited.

The rude standing-stone on the lonely moor, and the richly-sculptured column in the teeming city-square are alike emblems of a people's faith. In a thousand God's acres you will find a broken column raised as a memorial of a young life that has been cut short by the grim tyler of Eternity. Pillars are set up to mark the resting places of kings, the spots where nations have contended for freedom, and in the centres of civic life where law and order are proclaimed. Each is an index finger of thought pointing the meditative man to the record of a steadily advancing civilisation. Pillars, too - - the expression of an altruistic faith - - are set up on every inhabited shore washed by the waters of

the world to guide the mariner from the rocks and reefs that lure him to destruction.

And as all are raised by the mallet and chisel of the operative, so all may be eloquent with singularly wise speech for the speculative Mason. The standing stone, though but the emblem of a pagan faith, bears witness to the eternal belief in God; the monument in the city square embodies a nation's desire that the memory of great men shall not die; the pillar that marks the resting place of Kings, or the spot where freedom has been won, or the laws of government have been proclaimed, is the symbol of a people's loyalty, and the expression of the universal sense of justice and right.

Yet while all these-belief in God, honour to men, loyalty to the King, and recognition of social rights-are tenets of our Masonic faith, perhaps in a truer sense is the Pillar that guides the lonely mariner at sea a symbol of our Craft. What is Freemasonry if it is not a giant lighthouse? Down through the years its kindly beams have shone across the troubled waters of life, carrying with them their message of hope and goodwill and kindly thought for those in peril and distress. And it is not too much to assert that, just as the Pillar or Cloud by day and the Pillar of Fire by night, led and protected the fathers of Solomon in their dreary march from the land of bondage to the house of freedom, so the twin pillars, whose names are Jachin and Boaz, have been the means of bringing happiness and joy into the hearts of countless thousands of our race.