

THE TROWEL

Freemasonry is a crusade for a better world. Each individual Mason has a mission to propagate brotherly love among men under an atmosphere of mutual understanding and goodwill.

Operative masons use trowels to spread the cement or mortar which unites the bricks or stones of a building into a common mass. The trowel is the instrument which is used to distribute the bonding material in the proper proportions between the separate building units of a structure.

Speculative Masons are taught to regard the trowel as the principal tool of a Master Workman. Its symbolical use is to spread the cement of brotherly love and affection; and it is no mere coincidence that the principal working tool of a Master Mason is linked to the central purpose which Freemasonry has always proclaimed.

Obviously, Freemasons should be concerned with a figurative trowel, a symbol, which represents a certain kind of behavior, a mode of conduct, which every Master Mason is charged to practice. In the transfer of ideas involved in such a metaphor, it is clear that the individual Brother is being exhorted to become a trowel which distributes in proper proportion the bonding materials of brotherly love and affection. He is to be a force which helps to unite the divided human units of society into a harmonious structure of civilization.

The founders of Speculative Freemasonry bequeathed to their followers a book of moral charges. The "Ancient Constitutions" mean little

if they are not interpreted as such, with the underlying idea being the ancient virtue of *humanitas*, the ability to express humane feelings,—kindness, gentleness, helpfulness,—by means of a benevolently disciplined character which has achieved good breeding and culture, and which displays them through brotherly love.

The principal object of Freemasonry has always been to perfect the individual and to guide mankind toward a better, more harmonious development. The individual Mason is a Builder on the Temple of Human Brotherhood; he is both the trowel and the cement which combine the units of society into a cohesive whole. The brotherly love he extends to others is the trowel; the appreciation and affection he arouses are the cement which helps to bind men closer to each other.

Clear as this central purpose seems to be in the ritual of Freemasonry, as well as in the teachings of Masonic thinkers in every generation, one is often led to wonder how many Masons have really understood this fundamental idea of Masonic *humanitas*. How many Brothers consciously use the trowel of brotherly love to spread the cement of appreciation and understanding?

Masonic brotherly love is not a mere sentimentality, which one puts

on like an apron when one goes to lodge. The trowel of brotherly love cannot be restricted to applying the mortar of good will when one is dealing with a Brother Mason. Brotherly love is a mode of conduct to which a Builder trains his emotions and feelings, for which he learns to subdue his passions, so that his trowel may spread the mortar of harmony among all men with whom he labors, not only Brother Masons.

Masonic brotherly love is not merely a breezy, cheerful "glad hand", which manifests itself in a bubbling demonstrativeness with old and new acquaintances, but rarely has time to look or listen for the sounds of spiritual distress or human need in the hearts and voices of those around us. Masonic brotherly love is not generally exemplified by the overpoweringly garrulous salesman who "wants to do you a favor". The mortar of brotherly love needs a stronger bonding ingredient than that; the trowel must distribute the cement in better proportions.

Masonic brotherly love is not mere courtesy, either. To listen politely, to answer respectfully, to avoid giving pain may be some of the marks of a gentleman; but they are not always the purposeful acts of a Builder who is consciously using the trowel of brotherly love and affection. Merely to acknowledge others, but not to respond to them, is using a thin wattery mortar which will never bond the ashlar together properly. To love others is to accept them, their prejudices as well as their amiable virtues, and to work with what they have and really are. To reject them, no matter how courteously, is still a rejection, an ingredient which no good Builders puts into the mortar

he mixes for the Temple of Brotherly Love.

Yet, if these negative descriptions represented the chief misunderstandings of the true nature of Freemasonry's great purpose, to spread the cement of brotherly love and affection, they would merit little attention. The great problem of the builder is that of indifference. The number of trowels that are lying idle is staggering.

How often we hear people say, "Oh, I'd like to do something constructive, something fine. But I'm tied up in so many things. I'm called on for help, I'm on the go, so much I just don't have time to think anymore."

Masons are people, and many a Mason has given a similar response: "I just don't have time to think about Masonry." And so another trowel lies uselessly in the tool chest, while the Grand Architect cries for Master Workmen to mount the scaffolding of the Temple of Universal Brotherhood. The ingredients for the mortar are still packed in the storeroom; there aren't enough Builders to mix the cement and carry it away.

This is one of the widest held and most dangerous errors of our time, that a man is too busy to do something in accordance with his ideals, to be of help to others. As a matter of fact, the busier a man is, the more numerous are his opportunities to use the trowel of brotherly love and affection. Furthermore, in a willingness to spread the cement of love and understanding lies the surest guarantee of real inner peace and life.

long satisfaction. One doesn't have to accomplish big things, or even to neglect one's duties, to achieve those spiritual rewards.

It is just such activity, the application of the trowel of brotherly love, which Albert Schweitzer calls "the second lesson of life". It stimulates noble and ennobling responses; it awakens dormant and forgotten powers. Unused human capabilities are given meaningful expression; and what this world needs most today are people who concern themselves with the spiritual needs of others.

Every man, believes Dr. Schweitzer, can enrich and develop his personality, no matter how busy he may be, by seizing every opportunity to release the spiritual power of love which he possesses. How? By completing "the second lesson of life", which to Masons means the faithful and proficient use of the trowel of brotherly love and affection.

In a personal anecdote, the great philosopher illustrates what he means. "I once sat next to a lively young man in a third class railroad compartment. He gave the impression that he was always aware of something not visible to the rest of us in the conditions around him. Opposite him sat a very nervous old man who seemed to be terribly worried. When the young man remarked that it would be dark before the train reached the next town, the old man began to quiver and exclaimed fearfully, 'I don't know what I'm going to do. My only son is in the hospital there. He's awfully sick. I got a telegram this morning to come as soon as possible. But I'm from the country; I'm afraid I'll get lost in the big city.' Whereupon the young

man said reassuringly, 'I know the town well. I'll get off with you and take you to your to your son. I'll catch a later train.' And as they got off the train, they walked along the platform like brothers."

Most of us go through life with our eyes closed to many of the opportunities which we have for working on the Temple of Universal Brotherhood. Struck by the dazzling structure as designed upon the trestle-board, we are blind to the little tasks which lie close at hand. We fail to grasp our trowels to spread the mortar of understanding and good will in the situation right before us.

And in this indifference may lie one of the greatest causes of the illnesses which are troubling the Fraternity today. In a simpler age, when Brothers really knew each other and lived with each other's needs and triumphs and tribulations, Masonic charity and benevolence were the concern of almost every Builder. He knew how to use the trowel of brotherly love and understanding.

But with the tremendous growth in our membership and in the rootlessness of so much of our population today, our Masonic benevolence has become institutionalized and consequently more impersonal. Many a Brother has seen a dazzling picture of his Masonic Home or Hospital; but it was just a vivid picture. It called for no action from his trowel of brotherly love and affection.

"The trowel is an instrument made use of . . .", but until it is actually employed, it is useless. It the greatest need of our time is for men who understand friendship, morality, and brotherly love, . . . if the greatest danger to modern man is the loss of

individuality because of the demands for conformity and obedience to dogma, Freemasons should be especially suited to fill the need and to overcome the danger. But the trowel of every Master Mason must go to work each day!

Just as operative masons use special tools for particular situations, so Speculative Masons must learn to use specialized trowels for spreading the cement of brotherly love and affection. Operative craftsmen use corner trowels, curbing trowels, guttering trowels, brick trowels, pointing trowels, — each one shaped and fashioned for a particular operation.

Speculative Master Masons must learn to use the specialized trowels of appreciation, admiration, compliment, and congratulation to spread the mortar of mutual esteem which harmonious community life requires. Speculative Master Masons must learn to use the specialized trowel of forbearance and conciliation to spread the cement of mutual respect and confidence without which democracy cannot function. Speculative Master Masons must learn to use the specialized trowel of reverence for truth and for the dignity of every individual. No matter how disagreeable either may be, to infuse into public life the essential ingredients of personal freedom.

Speculative Master Masons must learn to use the specialized trowel of kindness and gentleness, of compassion and service to all men, if they would spread the cement of genuine love and understanding.

This must be the great objective of Masonic education, if Builders are to learn how to use their tools properly, especially the trowel. This must be the fundamental program of Freemasonry, if it is to remain true to the central purpose of its ancient charges and landmarks.

Just as an operative workman learns to use each trowel for a particular need or situation, so every Master Mason needs to learn the uses of the spiritual trowels which symbolize the power of brotherly love and friendship. There is need in every lodge for more Masonic instruction than that contained in the ritual.

Every Builder should be helped to that realization, so beautifully described by Joseph Fort Newton, which comes to proficient Craftsmen who have learned to use the trowel:

"When is a man a Mason? When he knows how to sympathize with men in their sorrows, yea even in their sins — knowing that each man fights a hard battle against many odds. . . . When no voice of distress reaches his ears in vain, and no hand seeks his aid without response. When he finds good in every faith that helps any man to lay hold of divine things and sees majestic meanings in life, whatever the faith may be. . . . When he knows that down in his heart every man is as noble, as vile, as divine, as diabolic, and as lonely as himself, and seeks to know, to forgive, and to love his fellow man."

