

The Entered Apprentice Trestleboard

By Bryan Minich

Many of the mysterious symbols we use in Freemasonry are full of rich and meaningful messages. In our craft, we use an object to signify something useful and then we teach what that object means to a Master Mason in an effort to spread the splendor of our fraternal cement. We teach the meaning to us, and we leave the brother to discover what truth, moral inclination or philosophy he sees within the object. This lecture will open with a common symbol or image within our fraternity, and hopefully end with a useful explanation of the image, leaving you my brothers to ponder what truths, moral inclinations and philosophy you can impart to another worthy brother of the same.

This is the tradition and custom of our gentle craft where the word is spoken from one brother to the other brother. The image you see before you brothers is something quite simple. Everything you can observe within the object represents items within the lodge. This object is a painting that Brother J. Bowring painted for us in 1919. In reflection, one could see the whole of the lodge represented in this beautiful depiction, known as the "Entered Apprentice Trestle Board".

Throughout this lecture we will take each item within it and discuss the significance of them within our fraternity. Remember brothers, that although you may see something in each item, another brother may view something different. There are no right or wrong answers that can be given in discussion, however our objective is to find truths, moral inclinations or philosophic ideas

derived from the images. It is a belief that as good and pleasant it is for brother's to dwell together in unity, the equal application of patience and understanding of our opinions applies truth to the reality of our spoken word. In short my brothers, a discussion that is conceived from respect, mutual love of the idea and hope for the future reflects the best prospect for attaining truth.

To begin our examination, we notice the painting is situated west to east with the indented tussle surrounding its boarder. By the directions we are reminded that we are traveling from the west to the east in search of light. By the indented tussle, we are reminded that we have a boarder that protects the beauty inside from the profane outside. Many phrases can be derived from this such as (Don't judge a book by its cover. The truest beauty is always within). What other thoughts do you have?

Next, we move inside the tussle and discover the mosaic pavement of black and white. By this we learn the word is full of good and evil. Every step we take within the world we are beset with good an evil constantly surrounding us. Good cannot exist without evil, and evil cannot exist without good. Our first lesson in duality or the attraction of a positive to the negative. Take for a moment a magnet, see if the two positive sides will attract. Now see if the two negative sides will attract. No matter the combination, they will not attract to one another and therefore we are given our lesson in science.

The next objects are the divinely spoken of pillars that guard the west door, Boaz representing beauty and Jachin representing strength. At the top of these ornaments we find again another pair of opposites that cannot give us a day without them and they are one of the first creations of the Supreme Architect of the Universe. These are the Terrestrial and Celestial Orbs. One is of

the earth and the other of that which is beyond the earth. One is light in color while the other dark in color. They give so many clues to many mysteries that our ancient brethren risked their very lives to contemplate upon and give us the ability to speak freely of them today. We are given a lesson again in the majesty of the Grand Architect's vision for what we know as the universe, the lunar terms of summer and winter. There is but one pillar that is not visually erected inside the lodge, yet it is represented in this painting. That pillar is in the east and represents the Worshipful Master, who is the wisdom of the lodge. So now we are able to discover the three principle pillars that our craft is supported by and they are Wisdom, Strength and Beauty in descending order.

Attending the pillars, we see the jewels of the Worshipful Master (The Square), the Senior Warden (The Level) and the Junior Warden (The Plumb). It makes sense that each pillar should represent these supporting stations as they are the governance and weight bearing offices within the lodge. By these symbols we are taught that the Junior Warden will ever remind us to walk upright and without stagger, the Senior Warden will ever remind us that we are traveling upon that level of such short time, where no traveler shall return to his starting point, and the Worshipful Master who gives us the wisdom of the Grand Architect of the Universe.

The next images we observe are the Tracing Board or Trestleboard, the point within a circle, the Holy Bible or Book of Constitutions. The Trestleboard reminds us of the designs of our lives according to our creator. Each one is unique, yet similar in design as to denote the common values of our order or like minds, and the individuality that make each creation unique. The Point within the Circle is a miracle that we only understand as gift

from our father to us the son. It is represented by two parallel lines, a circle and a point within the circle. The two parallel lines are the Patron Saints of John the Baptist and John the Evangelist, who protect us and they are celebrated by feasts in the summer and winter. The point within the circle is a representation of us brothers. We become the center of the lodge and the most celebrated item within the lodge. As we stand within the circle we embrace the divine, the celestial and we gather the word of God. There is only one point within this circle and although we may be guided to this point by a friend and afterwards find him to be a brother, we stand alone before our creator, answering only to him for our sins and gaining the wisdom he has made clear to us in the words within the book of scriptures. The center of the Lodge has a posted alter, in which our book of scriptures are placed for our search of knowledge, and on top of the scriptures are the square and compasses. These items are the world renowned symbols of our order. By them we are taught to always act upon the square, and circumscribe our behavior. It is fitting that most of the commandments of the Grand Architect to his people can be taught to us using just these two instruments. Although a person may not have the wisdom or sight to be able to read the word, there is symbology that can be used to illustrate the design the Grand Architect has for us.

The next image we see directly above the Book of Constitutions is a ladder and upon the ladder we see three divine looking women equally ascending the ladder towards the heavenly sky. The ladder we are taught is representative of Jacob's ladder, where we are reminded that where three or more gather, we have a temple. The ladder again gives each brother a message and transports the brother's messages back to his

father. These messages pass through the divine women who represent the virtues of Temperance, Prudence and Fortitude. One virtue is missing in this painting and can you name it? (Justice)... Why do you think that Justice was omitted from this painting? Could it be that we should reserve judgment for the Grand Architect as he spoke "Do not judge, lest he be judged"? The image of Prudence holds the Book of Constitutions in her lap and a peace dove in her left outstretched hand. She is clothed in gold and wearing a blue sash, which we know to be a noble color within our order. Fortitude is the next image we observe in the middle of the ladder. She is in possession of the anchor, and a key. We are taught that we may know the journeys we make may be beset with all kinds of peril, however there is always a safe harbor for which we can obtain respite. The key reminds us that although a door may be locked to us, if we knock it shall be opened to us. This image is dressed in the colors of green and she is adorned with a pink scarf. By these colors we are reminded of the growth and the pink is that hope for the future. Without hope for the future we cannot attain that heavenly ascension. The final image is that of Temperance. She is positioned at the top of the ladder and possesses the children of the world. We are taught that children require much of our attention and we must temper ourselves to enormous frustration that comes from a lifetime of teaching, raising, working, and living with one another. She has the nurturing downward head that reminds us of the soft spoken words of our mother. She is clothed in yellow with a white veil. These colors represent the cherished peacefulness of a kind work and the peace of the world.

The next images we observe are the rough ashlar, setting mal, the twenty four inch gauge, charcoal, smooth ashlar and

gong. The rough ashlar is in the northeast corner and the smooth ashlar is in the southeast corner. We are taught the cornerstone is the strength and support of all structures from our ancient brothers. Could this be a mistake of symbology by placing the stone that is hewn from the cliffs and still in rough form in the Northeast or is there some other explanation for its positioning both in this painting and with the lodge? In my own reflection it represents the newest building block for the temple, and represents the youthful. It is the youthful who are our future, and they will stand longer through time than polished stones that have been weathered. Additionally, we know that is our symbol of the beginning of the perfection that we all aspire to become in the finished stone. Upon the rough ashlar we observe the setting mal and twenty for inch gauge. We are reminded to utilize the twenty four inch gauge to measure and layout our work. To divide our time wisely, and never stray from those noble duties which we know are prayer, brotherly love and affection, our usual avocations, to rest the weary soul, and refresh the spirit. The setting mal also reminds us of death. We are reminded that death comes to each of us and we do not know when this will take place. We are taught to make the most of each day without suffering injury to our God, our country, our neighbor and ourselves. The chalk reminds us of the instruments used to make our marks on the world and at the end of our toilsome journey, it will mark our final resting place where our perfect stone shall remain as a representation of a true, lawful, observant and worthy life. The smooth ashlar reminds us of that perfect stone and a lifetime of good labor as a Mason. It is this stone that reminds us of that spiritual building within the heavens where no tool or sound is made by the laboring blows of tools. Finally, atop the smooth ashlar we observe the gong that will sound the death

toll. It alerts the world that the working tools of life have fallen from the hands of God's creation, and we are to pause for the duration of the sound to reflect on the labor of the fallen.

The Mason is constantly reminded of the tasks of his life by this simple image. It takes us back to the beginning and it tells a story as the eyes wander. It ends as all creation ends in death. Or does it. From death we ascend to that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, where we receive the welcome words of our creator... "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter now into the joys of the Lord".

As we enter the holiday season, enjoy this collection of thoughts. Meditate in your leisure time and ponder the fondness we have of our gentle craft and reverence to our creation. Be thankful of every mystery and every brother, who provides us clarity and truth in all our travels upon that level of time. Let peace come over you throughout this journey and give your thoughts, lessons, and love to another young brother seeking his tour of truth.