

THE MASONIC RESEARCH NETWORK
OF THE VALLEY OF SIOUX CITY, ORIENT OF IOWA
IS PROUD TO PRESENT:

MASONIC SYMBOLS; THEIR MEANINGS AND PROBABLE ORIGIN

By Thomas P. C. Barnard

Posted: November 2010



Source: *The American Freemason*, Vol. IV, Number 10, August 1913

AN E-MASONIC EDUCATION SITE

MASONIC SYMBOLS; THEIR MEANINGS AND PROBABLE ORIGIN

THOS. P. C. BARNARD

The American Freemason, Vol. I, Number 2, December 1909



Of the Masonic student Symbolism is of most absorbing interest and furnishes food for serious thought.

I do not claim any authority - what I offer is the result of some fifteen years of thought and investigation. Naturally, I cannot go into minute detail nor examine all the sources of our Symbolism, but must content myself with giving the results of my investigations, with the hope that some one better fitted than I may be induced to take up this fascinating study.

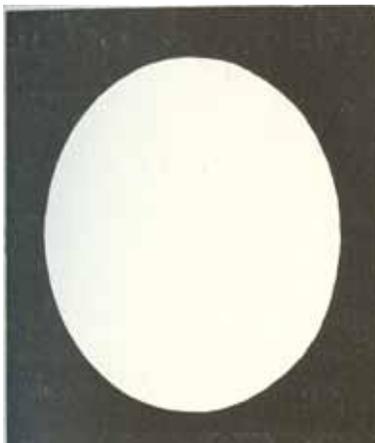


FIGURE 1

"Many years ago, on the eastern plains, was this our institution founded." A wise saying this, when taken in connection with the facts that the families of the human race had their origin in the East, and that our Fraternity has existed "from the foundation of civil society."

Go back as far as we will in history we find traces of Secret Societies - called Brotherhoods - and of Initiates - called Brothers or Brethren. The earliest of whom there seem to be any record are the Eastern Brothers. Following these came the Persian Brothers, the Egyptian Brothers, the African Brothers, etc.

In the early days and races these societies grew and flourished among the educated of the times. They rose to positions of power, and were successively destroyed by the ignorant masses.

+

FROM Science we learn that there are two things which are coeternal and co-existent, viz: Force and Matter, or Life and Form. In these old Brotherhoods. the LIFE was the body of the teachings, which were given forth in symbol, allegory and ceremony. The FORM was the outer organization.

As fast as one form or society was destroyed, another arose to take its place, and the surviving members of the old fraternity engrafted on the new the former teachings. After the destruction and disbanding of a great number of the more ancient Brotherhoods, many members went to Greece and founded (among other societies) the Pythagorean Mysteries, and to this day Pythagoras is spoken of as "our ancient friend and brother."

These societies were in their turn destroyed and their teachings passed on to the Gnostics and many others, who were, in their turn, disbanded and destroyed by a political and ecclesiastical hierarchy jealous of their power and influence. The clean-living Initiates formed too great a contrast to the corruption with which they

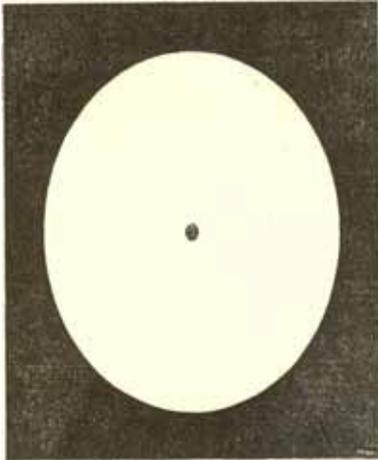


FIGURE 2

were surrounded, to be tolerated, and so were, as far as possible, exterminated by fire, rack and all sorts of torture.

I do not intend to trace the survivors in their various wanderings but traces of them still exist. After passing through many vicissitudes they affiliated with the Working Guilds of the Middle Ages, and gradually impressed the ancient teachings upon their forms and ceremonies. Thus were preserved to us the teachings of antiquity, and we of today have, in our modern Masonry, the result of the union of these various [sic] streams. I cannot go more into detail, but you will readily see that our Fraternity sprang from these various sources, and in our ritual still exist traces, quite well marked, of the various streams that have united and formed modern

Freemasonry. Some of them we will consider briefly. The Working Guilds we will not touch at all, as there is so much to which you can find ready access.

The Pythagorean influence is similar to the Eastern, and will be dismissed with the statement that of this we have a very large fragment left in our second degree. Of all the historical characters mentioned in Masonry, Pythagoras probably exerted the greatest influence on our Order.

If we would thoroughly understand the meaning of our symbols and allegories it is necessary that we know something of the thought of those by whom they were adopted. I can, perhaps, best show you what I mean if I choose an illustration which is quite apt. You all must know that our scientists are now able to read the Egyptian hieroglyphics. Those of us who read their translations little know the difficulties that had to overcome.

In the early days they were very much puzzled as to why a woman was represented by the figure of a vulture. A person whose mind easily turns to the ludicrous might be inclined to say that it is because woman is a "bird;" and those afflicted with the *traditional* mother-in-law may think the symbol well chosen. The fact of the matter is that the ancient Egyptians believed that of all living creatures the vulture exhibited the greatest amount and highest degree of maternal affection; hence the choosing of this bird as the hieroglyph to represent woman.

It is useless for us to attempt an interpretation of the symbols we are about to consider without an understanding of the modes of thought and the angle from which the ancients viewed them.

The purpose for which symbols were adopted was to condense into a pictorial form, which could be easily remembered, the teaching as to the origin of cosmos and of man; to say nothing of impressing moral precepts of the mind. If therefore, we would understand the symbol, we must know the original teaching.

Such fragments of our symbols as remain to us and have not been lost through ignorance of their true meaning, point to the fact that they are in close relationship with the symbols adopted by Eastern Nations.

Let us now briefly consider what idea the ancients had as to the way in which a solar system such as ours, came into being. What was their theory?

They represented the condition of affairs before the solar system came into being by a white circle in a black background (Fig. 1.) It represents the condition of affairs when all energy and manifestation were asleep in the bosom of the Eternal Father, and they summed up the condition with the words "Naught was." This immaculate disc represents space and eternity in rest. The circle represents the Divine Unity, from which all proceeds and to which all returns. The circumference of the circle indicates the Universal Soul and the plane of It's activity-although the two are really one. They taught that everything that was, is and is-to-be is contained therein.

Prior to manifestation this condition was said to exist, and at the moment of manifestation it is said that the Supreme spoke the WORD which, through *it's* vibrations marked out the boundaries of the future universe and as a result, there occurred a condensation, within certain limits, of the already pre-existing matter with which space is filled, and this is represented by the symbol of the circle - sometimes by a serpent swallowing it's own tail.

There is a tradition to the effect that this WORD is the MASTER-WORD, which was lost, and that "the wisdom of future generations" will not "discover and bring" it "to light" until man has in very truth become so pure that he is in reality "one with his Father in Heaven."

The circle then, represents chaos, the condition existing prior to manifestation, and is the symbol of the ever-unknowable Father, the Absolute - of Eternity Itself.

Into this matter within the circle a force is now injected. This is represented by the point within the circle (Fig. 2.) The point appearing within the hitherto immaculate disc, denotes the dawn of differentiation or activity. This point within the circle represents the beginning of creation or manifestation and is the sign of the First Logos (as our ancient Greek Brothers called Him) - the Grand Artificer of the Universe.

At this point there comes to my mind the first verse of the first chapter of St. John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." Taken in the light of our symbolism, this passage becomes intelligible, for we can translate it thus: In the beginning (at the dawn of manifestation) was the Word (Logos, the Manifested God,) and the Word (the Manifested God) was with (the Unmanifested) God, and the Word was (the Manifested) God.

(Continued in Next Issue.)

Continued from December Issue.



THE circle with a point at the center, surmounted by the Holy Bible and with two perpendicular parallel lines outside [Fig. 3] is a comparatively modern symbol, and a corruption of the original. It is ridiculous to suppose that two saints and a book - no matter how much revered - should be greater than that which the circle symbolizes, viz., the All-Father - Eternity Itself.

These things should not be outside the circle, but within it. As it now stands the symbol places finite objects outside of the Infinite, and stands the symbol places finite not within it, It is but one of the many things showing how our symbols and ritual have been tampered with in order to toady to ecclesiastical power.

Another force now comes into play, and is symbolized [Fig. 4] by a circle cut by a diameter, and it is the symbol of the Second Logos, the Son, the Great Geometrician; dual in aspect - spirit-matter, God-man.

You will remember the statement that Masonry and Geometry were originally synonymous terms, When we consider that our Masonic system has to do with a scheme or plan on which the world was created; with the building of character; and that everything in the world - the cosmos itself - is



FIGURE 3

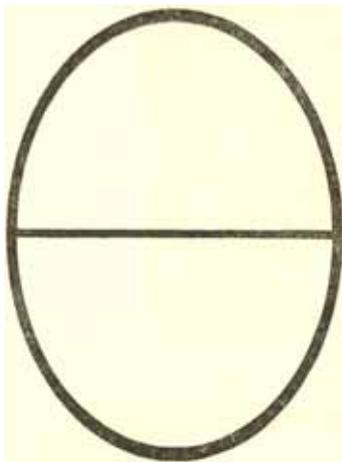


FIGURE 4

arranged on a geometrical plan, i.e., arranged according to the proportion of number; that even the leaves and branches of trees, the unnumbered snowflakes, and the cells composing our bodies are all arranged geometrically-then we will see the reason for this statement, Remember what is said as to our signs.

Still another force is now brought into operation, and as it is said to work at right angles to the other we have the symbol of the cross within the circle. [Fig. 5.] This is the sign of the Third Logos, the Lord and Giver of Life, and it shows that the ancients had at least some idea of that famous

dictum of science "there is no force without matter-no matter without force," We might change this into "there is no life without form, no form without life, or no matter without spirit, no spirit without matter."

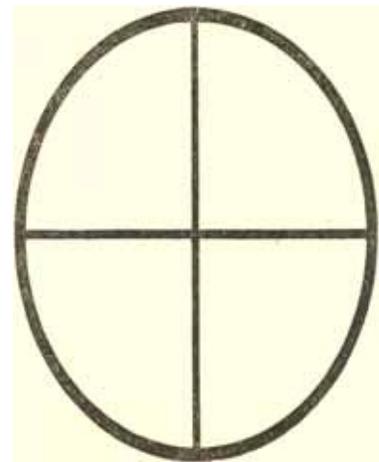


FIGURE 5

An ancient way of representing the Trinity was by the equilateral triangle, light in color (symbolized by chalk) with the point up, symbolizing spirit [Fig. 6.]



FIGURE 6

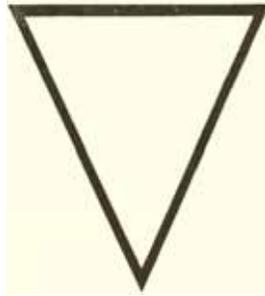


FIGURE 7

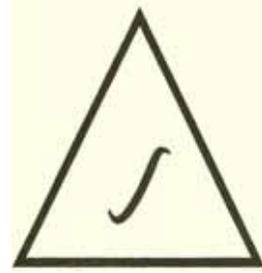


FIGURE 8

A black triangle with the point down [Fig. 7] shows the perversion of spirit, and indicates matter or evil (symbolized by charcoal.)

It is quite evident 'that the founders of the Order of the Eastern Star knew nothing of symbolism, or they would not have chosen a star with the point downward (which symbolizes evil) as an emblem 'of an Order having high spiritual ideals.

The jod or point within the equilateral triangle [Fig. 8] indicates the Absolute, with the Trinity in manifestation.

Solomon's Seal [Fig. 9.] is a way of representing the combination of the two co-eternal things, spirit and matter, with the Absolute (represented by the point) over back of them. These symbols may or may not be within a circle. Sometimes instead of the point we find [Fig. 10] the Tau, that symbol of immortality which is found on the breasts of Egyptian mummies. It is one of the symbols of Truth.

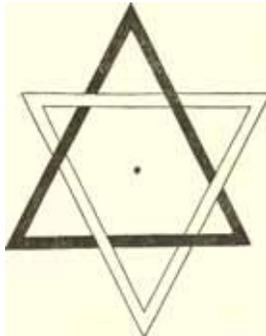


FIGURE 9

The ancient Greeks spoke of the three aspects of creation as the three *Logoi*, and called them, respectively, the First, Second and Third; postulating that back of them (that is. back of Manifestation) there lay the ever-incognizable Deity of Whom they spoke as the All-Father. It may well be that this is what St. Paul had in mind when he preached of the Unknown God to the citizens of ancient Athens.

It may be said in this connection that the writings of St. Paul reveal to us his familiarity with the esoteric wisdom and profound symbolism of antiquity. And it is only by gaining some knowledge of this hidden learning that we can hope to grasp the force of utterances which carried such powerful appeal to minds saturated with Greek philosophy.

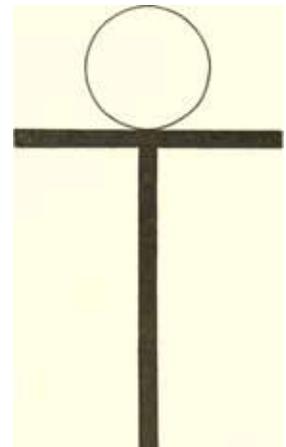


FIGURE 10

Continued from January.

It will have been noted by those who are following Bro. Barnard's valuable and interesting series that one figure in January issue was reversed. A white Triangle with the point up symbolizes Spirit.



FROM these three [aspects .of Creation] are said to emanate seven Great Beings, who correspond to the Archangels mentioned in the Christian, Jewish and Mahometan Scriptures. Their symbol is the seven-branched candlestick. [Fig. 11.] They are also the "seven spirits before the throne" of the Apocalypse. From them in turn are evolved seven hierarchies of angelic beings, of whom we hear as thrones, powers, principalities, etc. The function which these play in creation is said to be merely that of agents or assistants, and they are sometimes called "builders." Each hierarchy has a chief or head who, with his many assistants, has charge of one particular department of Nature, and the chief is called a Master Builder.

Note that all of the symbols (with a few exceptions) so far presented are within the circle, and so are the emblems of different stages in the unfolding of the Triple Logos, but not of His manifestation. When, in the fullness of time, He (or They) prepares for further manifestation, the symbol changes in one or other of two ways. Sometimes the circle falls away altogether, and then we have the even-armed Greek cross as the sign of the Third Logos at the commencement of a cycle, with his creative power held in readiness for exercise.



FIGURE 11

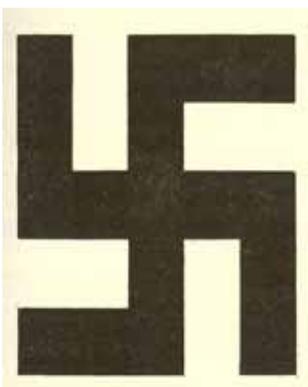


FIGURE 12

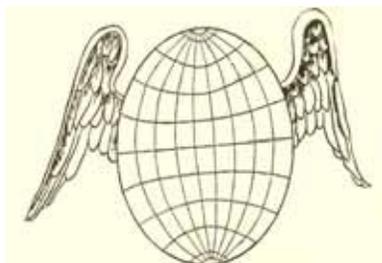


FIGURE 13



FIGURE 14

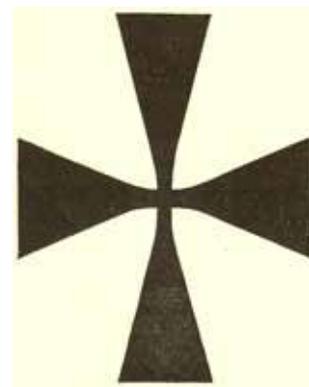


FIGURE 15

The next symbol [Fig. 12] would be the swastica, (one of the oldest of Masonic symbols, but which has been lost to us) which always implies motion - the Creative Power in activity; for the lines added at right angles to the arms of the cross are supposed to represent flames streaming backwards as the cross whirls round, and

thus they doubly indicate the eternal activity of the Universal Life; first, by the ceaseless outpouring of the fire from the centre through the arms, and, secondly, by the rotation of the cross itself. Another method of representing this is by the winged wheel or globe. [Fig. 13]. We find this mentioned in Ezekiel.

In mythology this was represented by the hammers of Vulcan and Thor, the hammer being merely one arm of the swastica. Its representative in the Lodge is the Master's Gavel, the symbol of power. [Fig. 14.]

Another method of expressing the same thing is seen in the Maltese Cross [Fig. 15], in which the arms, ever widening out as they recede from the center, once more typify the Divine Energy spreading itself forth in every direction in Space.

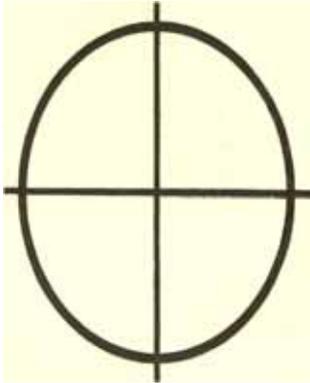
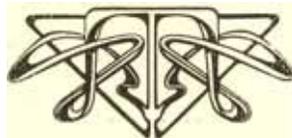


FIGURE 16

Sometimes, instead of dropping the circle altogether, the Cross simply extends outside of it. [Fig 16]. Then we get the equal-armed cross with a circle in the midst of it, and in the next stage that circle blossom forth into the rose - another well-known life emblem. So we have the familiar symbol from which the Rosicrucians take their name. [Fig. 17]. Again the cross not only bears the Mystic Rose in its center, but becomes rosy in color, showing that that which is poured through and out of it is ever the fire of Divine Love.



Continued from February.



THE Mystic Rose [Fig. 17] as was stated in the last number, is a development of the equal-armed cross within the circle. As was then said, the cross not only bears the mystic flower at its center, but also becomes rosy in color, showing that what is poured through and out of it is ever the Fire of Divine Love. From this symbol the Rosicrucians take their name.

The Greek Cross is the symbol of the Third Logos, while the Latin Cross [Fig. 18] and the Crucifix belong to the Second Logos or Son. Sometimes the Cross takes the form seen in Figure 19. The horizontal arm means Spirit, the perpendicular Matter; and the whole shows that Spirit is superior to Matter, although the two are combined in manifestation.

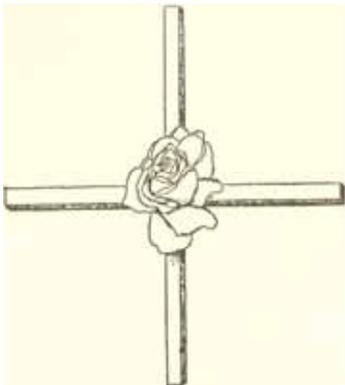


FIGURE 17

teaching that when, the sacrifice is voluntary its very essence is a joy that truly "passeth understanding." From such a symbol there comes forth the very breath of the Divine Love, with no shadow of sorrow or suffering.

The Crucifix probably originated in the Egyptian Mysteries, in which the candidate-after passing the tests of earth, water, air and fire-was bound to a cross of wood and placed on the side of the Temple or pyramid, where the rays of the rising sun might strike his face. The whole ceremony was intended to represent the descent of Spirit into and out of matter. The Cross serves to remind us that Man [the Spirit] is crucified on the cross of Matter [the Body.] It helps us to realize that we are not our bodies, and that when we find two selves warring within us, we should remember that we are in truth the higher and not the lower. the Christ and not the Cross.

The original symbol which represented the Son was, however, not the Latin Cross, but an upright human figure with the arms extended at right angles, [Fig. 20.] Subsequently this was combined with the Cross, and from this we have the Crucifix-the symbol of the eternal sacrifice, or descent of the Logos into matter. In the earliest forms of the Crucifix the face of the Christ did not express sorrow, but showed a most transcendent joy;

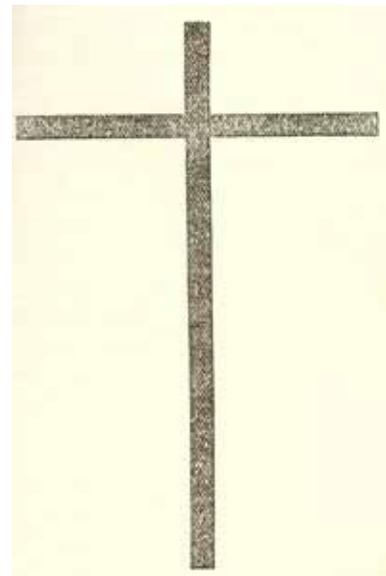


FIGURE 18

Our Jewish brethren had their own way of representing things. They postulated that beside the physical world there was also a spiritual world, and that in the latter dwelt the real, the true man, and with this in mind they said that the earthly man and worlds were but duplicates of the spiritual - imperfect manifestations of the real and permanent. Such, also, has been the secret teaching among all peoples and

in all ages. The myths of the ancient world, and the sacred symbols that have descended to us from furthest antiquity take on for us the profound significances with which they appealed to the initiate into the Mysteries. For then, as now, the wisest and best of men strove by means of material forms to interpret the things intelligible only to the spirit.

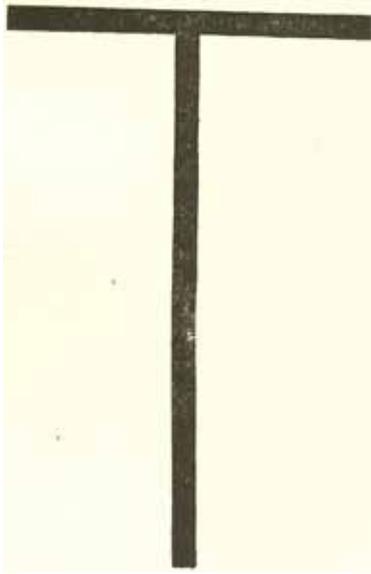


FIGURE 19

In the Jewish symbolism of the greater, spiritual man Figure 21 gives showing of their meaning. The triangle represents the head; the left line the left arm and leg; the middle line the trunk of the body; the right line the right arm and leg.

In the symbolism of the Temple the triangle is the sanctum sanctorum, the middle line the body of the Temple; the right and left lines represent the two famous brazen pillars with which Masons are familiar.

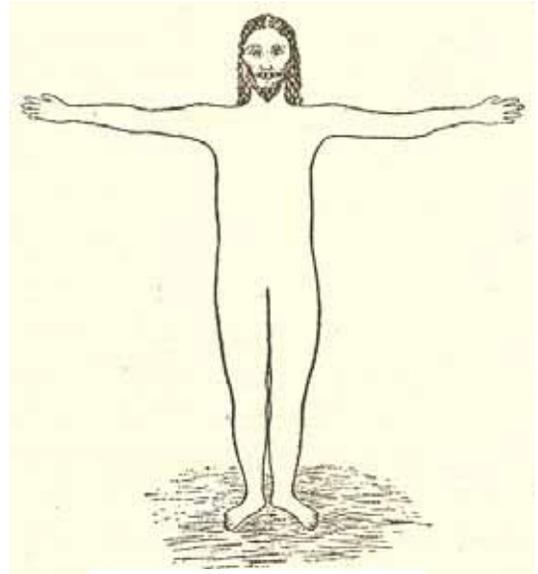


FIGURE 20

To be Continued.



THE triangle symbol is susceptible of many variations and has been used to convey many profound significances. Somewhat more elaborated the symbol of the triangle and lines [Fig. 21] becomes the eye within the triangle. [Fig. 22]. To it belongs a pillar (B) to the left; a Temple or Pyramid in the center, and another pillar (J) on the right.

The vital centers in the body of the spiritual man were said to be the Sephira (Angelic Beings,) represented in Figure 23 and when separated the symbol makes the number 10, the perfect number.

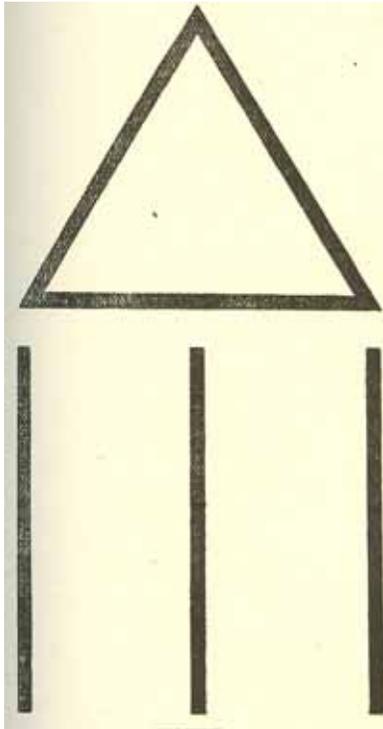


FIGURE 21

Our Masonic system will now be seen to be a combination from many sources, and I trust what has been said will enable the reader to see that our Fraternity is the custodian of much of value, and induce you to study our symbols still further.

There is enough in our first three degrees to afford a life-time of serious study, and I can but regret that so few of the brethren realize this.

In conclusion let me remind you - in words that are familiar but may now take on a new meaning - that:

"The lapse of time, the ruthless hand of ignorance and the devastations of war have laid waste and destroyed many valuable monuments of art, upon which have been expended the utmost exertions of human genius. Even the Temple of Solomon itself, so stupendous and magnificent and wrought by so many celebrated artists, escaped not the unsparing hands of barbarous hordes. Freemasonry, notwithstanding, still survives. Tools and implements of architecture, and

symbolic elements most expressive have been selected by the Craft to impress upon the mind wise and useful truths; and thus, through a succession of ages,

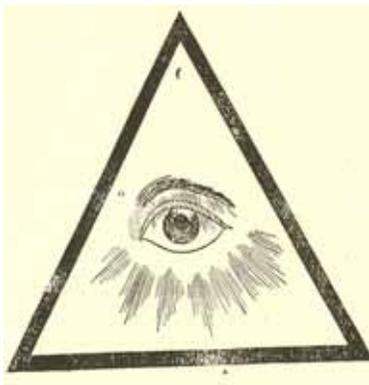


FIGURE 22

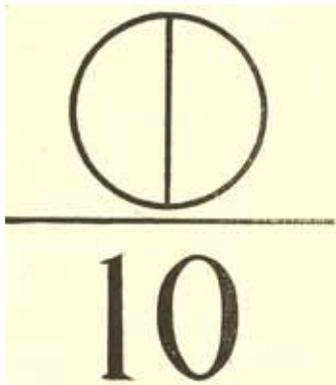


FIGURE 23

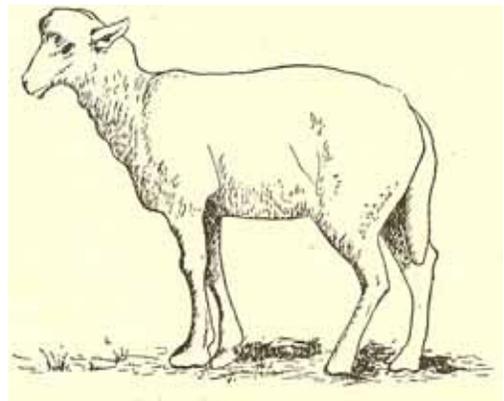


FIGURE 24

have been transmitted unimpaired the most valuable tenets of our profession."

Our outer form has been destroyed in the past - may be destroyed again and again; but the immortal spirit-symbolized by the lamb [Fig. 24] - the great body of truths which we have inherited from the Fathers, will live throughout the ages for the benefit of all man-kind, and from the grave of matter which holds our dead form - symbolized by the goat [Fig. 25] - will spring up, perpetually, the evergreen sprig of spiritual acacia.



FIGURE 25

The history of the world is the record of the perpetual warfare between Ahriman and Ormuzd; of the powers of Evil against the armies of Good. When we look upon the work done by our French and Italian brethren at the present time, may we not truly say that they are perpetuating the very ideals which we have commended in the great Reformers, and ought we not therefore, for that reason only, if for no other, to extend to them the hand of fellowship-that fellowship whose practical results have done more for the elevation, the happiness of mankind. than all the discussions of dogmatic theology as enunciated by an intolerant hierarchy - John S. Thibaut. Grand Master Louisiana.