



## THE TROWEL



### I

This emblem is like a key; while insignificant in itself, it opens up matters of such vast importance that to pursue its teachings through all their ramifications would itself require a book; consequently I can only hope to set down a few hints of the rich and various applications of it.

There is no need to say that of all working tools it is the most appropriate to the Master Mason Degree; it carries that significance upon its surface. The Entered Apprentice, who can make only a beginning at the task of shaping the ashlar, needs only the gavel and the gauge. The Fellow Craft, to bring the stone into completeness of size and form, requires the plumb, square, and level. The Master Mason's task is to set the finished stone in its place and bind it there, for which purpose the trowel is his most necessary tool. Therefore the Master Mason has been given the Trowel as his working tool because it is most symbolic of his function in the great work of Temple Building. When the Trowel has done its work there is nothing more to do, because the structure stands complete, a united mass, incapable of falling apart. The stones which were many have now, because of the binding power of the cement, become as one.

### II

If the stone represents an individual man, and if the Temple represents the Fraternity as a whole, it is evident that the Trowel is the symbol of that which has power to bind men together. Therefore arises the question, "What is this unifying power?" Let us undertake to answer this question from several points of view; the individual, the Fraternity, and the world at large.

We very frequently meet with men who seem to lack unity in their makeup; a spirit of disorganization is at work in them so that they seem to live at cross-purposes with themselves. What they know they should do they do not, and many things which they do they do against their own will. They may have personal force, but it is scattered and their lives never come to a focus. These men we say that they lack character and we say right. Character comes from a word that meant originally a graving tool; after long use the name of the tool came to be applied to the engraving itself, and thus the term has come to stand for a man whose actions give one an impression of definiteness and clear-cuttedness, like an engraving. A man who lacks character is a blur, a confused and self-contradictory mass of impulses and forces. The one salvation for such a man is to find some means of unifying himself, of using himself to some purpose so as to arrive at some goal.

What can he use? We may answer, perhaps, that he can best use an ideal, for an ideal is nothing other than a picture of what one wills to be which he ever keeps before him, as an architect refers to his blue prints. In short, the man needs a plan to live by, a thing we have symbolized in our Ritual by means of the tracing board.

Before the time of the Reformation, builders did not use plans drawn to scale as architects now do, but laid out their building design on the ground, or even on the floor of the workshop or the lodge. In early English lodges this design was often drawn on the floor in chalk by the Master, and the youngest Entered Apprentice would erase it with a mop and water at the end of the ceremony; after a while, to make this labor unnecessary. "The plan of work" was drawn on a permanent board which was set on an easel and exhibited during the degree, as is still done in England. The tracing board of a degree, therefore, is the plan of work for that degree, drawn in symbols and hieroglyphics. The tracing board itself, as it stands in the lodge, is a constant reminder to the Mason that, as a spiritual builder, he must have a plan or an ideal for his life. When the Mason does live in loyalty to an ideal he is a man of character, his faculties work in unison, there is no war between his purposes and his behavior, and he is able to stand among his brethren as a completed temple. Such a man has used a trowel in his own life.

### III

It is more difficult to answer the question, "What is the force that can unite individual Masons into a unified and harmonious Order?" A practicable answer may be found by asking a further question, "What is it that now unites us, even if imperfectly?" "What is the cement?" Perhaps we cannot point to any one thing. When I inquire of my own heart what it is that ties me to my fellow Masons I find myself thinking of many things. There is the sense of a wonderful history which links us to unknown brethren who lived generations ago. There is the symbolism of the Society, in which precious truths and living philosophies have been poured as into golden vases. There is the spirit which pervades the Order, a sense of oneness in purpose and aims, of tolerance, of charity, of patience and forbearing; there is also the remembrance of the obligation which I voluntarily assumed, and which wove into my heart a silken thread, the other end of which is woven into the hearts of my brethren. These and similar influences hold me to the Craft now and ever shall, but how to sum them up in one word I know not, except that word be Brotherhood. Brotherhood has suffered much from over-use, from sentimentalism and from oratory, but no other word can be found to take its place. Therefore we may say that, so far as the Fraternity itself is concerned, the trowel and the cement spread on by the trowel, is the kindly, pervasive, irresistible spirit and power of Brotherhood. True it is that:

"Fellowship is heaven;  
The lack of fellowship is hell."

If this be so we have already an answer to our last question; "What power can unite the scattered peoples and nations of the earth, especially in a time like this when they are more than ever sundered by passion and hatred?" Surely, if the spirit and influence of Brotherhood can call together two million men out of all classes and localities of America and can bind them into the solidarity of a great united Order. That same power can accomplish similar results if applied to the world at large. Diplomats and politicians do not seem to believe it, but it is true nevertheless, trite as it may sound. Freemasonry's benign genius of Fraternity was never more badly needed in the earth than just now. Every device has been used to bind the peoples together; force, money, fear, superstition, and what not. Let us hope that sooner or later the race will try the means proved so effective by more than two hundred years of Freemasonry.

Adapted from:

Haywood, Harry L. Symbolical Masonry (New York, New York; George H. Doran, 1923) pgs, 264 – 267

