

THE ANCHOR AND THE ARK

The Ark as a symbol in the third degree has been supposed by some to refer to the Jewish Ark of the Covenant, but others with more reason think it refers to the Ark of Noah. All the Ancient Mysteries seem to have contained allusions more or less clear to the Deluge and Noah's Ark. There being so many other symbols common to Masonry and the Mysteries, it is not surprising to find the Ark also employed as a Masonic symbol. To the pre-Christian ages, the idea of a regeneration, or a new birth, was as familiar as it is to us. In the Ancient Mysteries, we are best able to judge, the tradition of the Deluge and the Ark, by which the human race was reputed to have been both purified and perpetuated, was in a variety of forms employed to teach this doctrine of regeneration.

In the Funeral Ritual of the Egyptians, it is by means of the Ark or boat that the deceased passed to Aahlu or the place of the blessed in Amenti. (11) We are all familiar with the Greian myth which represents Charon as ferrying the shades of the departed over the river Styx. Thus it is seen that the Ark has for ages been the symbol of the passage from this world to the next. We attach to it a very similar meaning, it symbolizes to that power or influence by which we are fitted for and raised a higher state of existence in the life that is to come. (12)

The anchor does not seem to have belonged to ancient symbolism. Paul appears first to have employed it as an emblem of hope of immortality and bliss after this life (Heb. i, 19.) Kip, in his Catacombs of Rome, says that the primitive Christians looked upon life as a stormy voyage and that of their safe arrival in port the anchor was a symbol. Mrs. Jameson says that the anchor is the Christian symbol of immovable firmness, hope and patience. Though apparently of Christian origin as a symbol, there is nothing narrow or sectarian in its significance, and it may with equal propriety be employed by Jew and Gentile, as well as by all others who share in the belief of a peaceful place of abode hereafter for those who have made a proper use of this life. (Mackey's Encyclopedia, p 64.)

In the symbol of the Anchor and Ark we, therefore, see gain pressed upon our attention the doctrines of Deity, the Mediator, regeneration, resurrection and immortality.

THE FORTY-SEVENTH PROBLEM OF EUCLID

The Forty-Seventh Problem of Euclid is the earliest Masonic symbol we have on record; it appears as the frontispiece to Anderson's "Book of Constitutions," published at London in 1723, accompanied by the word "Eureka" in Greek characters. It will be understood that prior to this date only one book on Freemasonry had been printed, and not till three-quarters of a century later did our Monitors contain illustrations of the emblems and symbols. So it happens that the Forty-Seventh Problem is absolutely, so far as is known, the earliest illustration of Masonic symbol on record.

In the text of the same book it is declared to be "if duly observed, the foundation of all Masonry, sacred, civil and military," (p. 23) and in the second edition of this work (1738), he speaks of it as that "amazing proposition which is the foundation of all Masonry, of whatever materials or dimensions" (p. 26). This figure is known by a variety of names. The Theorem of Pythagoras, the Theorem of the Bride, and the Theorem of the Three Squares. It was also known as the Gnomon, the Greek word for knowledge, and Plato in his Commonwealth, denominates it the "Nuptial Figure." To our fathers in their school days, it was an object of dread, as the "Pons Assinorum," or the Bridge of Asses.

The remarkable properties of the right-angled triangle are well known to those who have studied geometry. Astronomers also are acquainted with its value; with it they measure the universe. Its usefulness is understood by architects and builders. Even those mechanics who are so ignorant that they do not know that a figure whose three sides are to each other as 3, 4 and 5 is a right-angled triangle, yet are aware of its convenience in making corners of a building perfectly square. When they measure three feet along one wall and four feet along the other, if five feet will exactly reach across, they know that the corner is square. These things were well understood by ancient and medieval operative Masons, and they constituted a part of their trade secrets.

But it is equally certain that to this beautiful triangle they ascribed moral and philosophical (not to say religious) meanings which are now little understood by us.

Of this figure Brother G. W. Speth says "it is certain that, while our medieval brethren may have been familiar with its symbolical meaning, we are not." (*Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, vol. III, p 27.) We are merely told in our monitors that "it teaches Masons to be general lovers of the arts and sciences." Perhaps this is true, but we are given no hint as to why or how it does so. The deeper meanings of this symbol are wholly lost

except to those who have made it a special study. Much of it I believe is lost beyond the hope of recovery.

GEOMETRICAL FIGURES

It is a curious fact, the psychological reason for which is not known, that dimensions increasing by half (e.g. a rectangle 20x30, a solid 20x30x45), and the ratios of the base, perpendicular and hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle whose sides are as 3, 4, 5, are very pleasing to the eye. The equilateral triangle in ways not now fully understood seems also to enter into the element of proportion in successful architecture.

Odd as it may appear that geometrical figures such as points, lines, superficies and solids, angles, triangles, squares and circles should be invested with such meaning, yet the fact is undoubted. The ancient moral philosophers attached what appears to us an inordinate importance to geometry and geometrical figures.

Plato, the greatest of philosophers, wrote 400 years before Christ on the porch of his academy, "Let no one who is ignorant of geometry enter my doors." He taught that God was "always geometrizing," and that "geometry rightly treated is the knowledge of the Eternal." (Idem, Vol. X p 83) At his time, geometry was the only exact science (arithmetic being not yet invented); hence, quite naturally a knowledge of this science was deemed indispensable to one in search of philosophical truth. To Pythagoras, all the ancient writers give credit for first having raised geometry to the rank of a science, and Proclus tells us that he "regarded its principles in a purely abstract manner and investigated his theorems from the immaterial and intellectual point of viewed." (Idem)

In short, "from the earliest times, the knowledge of geometry was looked upon not only as the foundation of all knowledge but even by the Greek philosophers as the very essence of their religion, the knowledge of God." (Idem, p 91.)

Numerous echoes of this ancient veneration for geometry are preserved in Freemasonry, thus affording further evidence of its great age. But of all geometrical figures the right-angled triangle, or set-square, was most revered by the ancients. It has from extremely remote ages and among extremely remote peoples borne profound moral significations.

Confucius, the great Chinese teacher, tells us (481 B. C.) that not till he was seventy-five years old "could he venture to follow the inclination of his heart without fear of transgressing the limits of the square." (Idem, Vol. XIV, p 30.)

In a Chinese book written between 500 B.C. and 300 B.C., called "The Great Learning" we are told that a man should not do unto another what he would not should be done to himself; "and this," it is there said, "is called the principle of acting upon the square." (Idem, p 31.)

It is, to say the least, a strange coincidence that the Greek word for square, "gnomon," also means knowledge and that the initial of this word, the Greek letter gamma is a perfect setsquare. As said by Brother Sidney T. Klein, a distinguished Mason and architect of England, to the ancients "geometry was the foundation of knowledge and gnomon was the knowledge of the square." (Idem vol. X, p 84, 92.)

In the symbolical writings of the Egyptians thousands of years ago, the square or right-angled triangle was the standard and symbol of perfection; it was also the symbol of life. (Idem, p 93.)

The ancients taught a very peculiar philosophy. According to their ideas Nature was tripartite, masculine, feminine, and offspring. This conception was applied in an endless variety of ways The sun was regarded as masculine or active; the moon as feminine or passive and Mercury as the offspring. So the ancient Egyptian Trinity consisted of Osiris the father, Isis the mother, and Her-ra, or Horus, the son. To represent this conception of Deity they employed a right-angled triangle whose sides were in the proportion of 3, 4 and 5, wherein the shortest side, 3, represented Osiris, 4 represented Isis, and 5, the resulting hypotenuse, represented Her-ra, the son, or the result of the union of the male and the female. This figure, therefore, became an emblem of life.

But as it also represented Nature, and as they were wise enough to see that Nature uninterfered with was perfect, this figure became the recognized symbol of perfection.

This implement so useful among operative Masons in testing the perfection of the work was, therefore, appropriately adopted by them as symbolical of that perfection which should mark the temple of human character. This symbolical square is the instrument by which all mental, moral and religious conduct is tested.