

THE PLUMB-LINE

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"Thus he shewed me: and, behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumb line, with a plumb-line in his hand. And the Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, a plumb-line. Then said the Lord, behold, I will set a plumb-line in the midst of my people Israel; I will not again pass by them any more." (Amos, VII: 7-8.)

The Degree of Fellow Craft deals with material interests of life and man's intellectual nature. Its object is to stimulate every incentive to pursue and attain those things that go to make up man's welfare and comfort in material things and in his mental development and satisfaction. The Degree addresses itself to the workman in the clay grounds, to the man who is engaged in the realms of the intricate sciences, to the liberal arts, and to the practical application of all scientific knowledge to a useful end.

The Scriptural Reading to this Degree is, often, an enigma; and the only relation that this Reading bears to the Degree to the average Mason, is the occurrence of the word "Plumb-Line" which somehow has something to do with the erection of walls and buildings. To understand this Scriptural Reading and its relations to the Degree of Fellow Craft, it is necessary to know the history and the application of this vision of Amos.

Amos lived and taught in the year 787 B. C. during the reign of Jereboam II of the Kingdom of Israel. The reign of Jereboam was chiefly characterized by mere formal religion, the arrogant assumption of power, cruel oppression for the accumulation of wealth for himself and Nobles. The poor could not attain justice in the Courts, and justice became rank injustice. It was a reign of a typical, practical politician who feasted and fattened off the poor and oppressed. In this reign of wealth, and degradation of the poor, Amos, the Reformer, arose and with fiery eloquence denounced the social conditions existing. He speaks of himself as, "I was no prophet, nor the son of a prophet, but I was a shepherd and dresser of sycamore." One of the ablest Commentators speaks of him as follows:-- "Amos was the first great social reformer in history; he was the tribune of the poor and oppressed. The rich and the rulers and those in authority were the special objects of his attacks. By them he was silenced as a dangerous agitator and banished from the Kingdom."

It was to correct the abuses of the very things inculcated in the Degree of Fellow Craft, that he laid aside his shepherd's crook to preach righteousness and justice. He might be called the prophet of the plumbline. Listen to his denunciations as he applies the plumb-line to the rulers.

Alas, for those who turn judgment to wormwood,
And cast righteousness to the ground,
Who hate him that reproves in the gate,
And who abhor one who speaks uprightly.

Therefore, because ye trample upon the weak
And take from him exactions of grain,
Houses of hewn stone have ye built,
But ye shall not dwell therein;
Charming vineyards have you planted,
But ye shall not drink the wine.

They who lie on ivory couches,
And sprawl upon divans,
And eat lambs from the flocks
And calves from the stalls,
They drawl to the sound of the lyre,
Like David, they devise for themselves instruments of song,
And drink bowls full of wine,
And anoint themselves with the finest oil,
But they do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph.

It is not surprising that he was banished from the country; truth hurt just as much in the centuries of the past, as now. In his final effort to arouse the people, he made use of intensely graphic word pictures in the form of visions. In the Metric form they are as follows:--

Thus the Lord showed me,
And, behold, he was forming locusts,
When the late spring grass began to come up.
And when they were making an end

Of devouring the vegetation of the land,
I said, O Lord, Jehovah, forgive, I pray;
How can Jacob stand, for he is small ?
Jehovah repented concerning this;
It shall not be, said Jehovah.

Thus the Lord showed me,
And, behold, he was giving commands to execute judgment
By fire--the Lord Jehovah.
And it devoured the great deep,
And had begun to devour the tilled land.
Then I said, O Lord, Jehovah, cease I pray;
How can Jacob stand, for he is small ?
Jehovah repented concerning this;
Neither shall this be, said Jehovah.

Thus the Lord showed me,
And, behold, the Lord was standing
Beside a wall, with a plumb-line in his hand.
And Jehovah said to me,
What dost thou see, Amos?
And I answered, a plumb-line;
Then the Lord said, behold, I am setting a plumbline
In the midst of my people Israel;
I will not again pass by them any more.

In placing the visions of the plague of locusts, of the drought, and of the plumb-line in their sequence, the meaning of the last line, "I will not again pass by them any more," is readily understood. The Lord's hand was stayed in the first and second vision by the prayerful and faithful Amos, and the vengeance of the Lord "Passed by," but in the vision of the plumb-line, He set a standard of measurement that can never be changed. The plumb-line, the symbol of national and individual rectitude and justice, will stand forever. "He will not again pass by any more." It will endure and can not be stayed.

The third vision contains the very essence of true worth and greatness. The plumb-line is the test of values. Twenty-four centuries before Speculative Freemasonry was born, this simple shepherd held aloft the plumb-line whose symbolic meaning was the same then, as it is today--the standard of rectitude, justice, uprightness, and true manhood. As such it is one of the most impressive symbols in Freemasonry. As such it stands preeminent in the Degree of Fellow Craft; the symbol by which the value of the material interests of life must be gauged and by which the use of man's intelligence must be tried. The symbolism is so plain, that it does not need any profound philosophy to unfold it, neither is it necessary to search for it along "geometrical lines." It stands clear, simple, and profound.

It matters not whether the Freemason toils, as a day laborer, in the clay grounds between Succoth and Zaredetha, or stands as the exponent of the liberal arts and sciences. There is but one standard for King or subject, rich or poor, educated or ignorant. The plumblines of moral rectitude must be applied to every walk in life.