

The MASON'S Mallet

by

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PREFACE

As the emblem of authority in a Masonic Lodge the mallet is invested with a good deal of interest. At the request of brethren who desired to know something of the origin and meaning of the tool I prepared the following lecture. Those who heard it, suggested that I might publish it for the benefit of a wider circle. I hope it will be found instructive.

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THE MASON'S MALLET

The Freemason is taught in the course of the First Degree that the Mallet is an important instrument of labour without which no work of manual skill can be completed, and he learns at a later stage that it is the emblem by which a Master is invested with authority to rule his Lodge. It is thus at once the first tool to be put into the untrained hands of the apprentice, and a symbol of the highest office to which the apprentice may aspire when he has become a Master Mason.

Considerable confusion exists as to the Mallet, the Gavel, and the Setting Maul. As a matter of general usage the word "Mallet" is used to denote all three, but sticklers for Masonic propriety give each its proper place. They maintain that the tool of the First Degree is "the common gavel"; that the Setting-Maul is an

emblem of death by violence and is peculiar to the Third Degree; while the Mallet, which is a miniature of the Setting-Maul is one of the working tools of a Mark Master. This arrangement is the one favoured by Bros. Mackey and Peck in their "Lexicon of Freemasonry," but sometimes they come perilously near to contradicting themselves, and if all they say is subjected to strict examination flaws in their arguments become apparent. Bro. Mackey insists that what he calls "the common gavel" is one of the working tools of an Entered Apprentice and says that "the true form" of it "is that of a stone-mason's hammer. It is to be made with a cutting edge that it may be used to break off the corners of rough stones,' an operation which could never be effected by the mallet." While this may be true, and while the work of breaking off the corners of the rough ashlar might be of a kind to which the apprentice operative would

naturally be turned on beginning his trade, the cutting edge of the tool clearly implies the absence of the chisel. Bro. Mackey's book deals, for the most part, with things as they are in America, and as, I understand, the chisel is not a tool of the First Degree there the point does not arise, but in Britain where the chisel is presented it cannot be used along with another tool that has a cutting edge and clearly must be associated with the mallet whether we describe that instrument as a gavel or a setting-maul. Bro. Oliver makes "the common gavel or setting maul" synonymous terms, and although Mackey expresses his surprise to see so learned a Mason as Oliver falling into what he calls this "too usual error," we may follow our English brother's example and allow our American friend to go on his way rejoicing.

The gavel or mallet of the Master is sometimes called a "Hiram." The name is obviously derived from the central figure in the Third Degree, and it is explained that the reason for so describing the tool is that as Solomon controlled and directed the workmen in the Temple by the assistance of Hiram the Builder, so the Master preserves order in the Lodge by the aid of the gavel. I cannot but think that both the name and the explanation are childish and fanciful. It is perhaps not too unkind to suggest that some brother, in a condition of more than usual merriness, had applied the word to the mallet in a moment of thoughtless vulgarity, and that it has lingered in the language of other unthinking Craftsmen as a little bit of Masonic slang. But it has absolutely nothing to recommend it, and, indeed, much to demand its disuse. The Christian Freemason of today is taught to regard the Third Degree as a symbol of the Resurrection, and if to the

mind of such a person there would be anything irreverent or objectionable in describing a cross as a "Christ," it should be equally distasteful to speak of the instrument of the builders as a "Hiram." While the maul or mallet of the operative mason follows a standard pattern as to shape and size; that of the Speculative assumes many forms and is made of vastly differing materials. A collection of the mallets of the Lodges throughout the land would chew many interesting varieties. I have seen one made of wood from Gethsemane, another made from a timber of the old Mother Kilwinning Lodge room, and a third made from a whale's tooth. But whatever the form or the material employed, the moral lessons are the same. On the threshold of our faith the Entered Apprentice is taught that the Mallet conveys the lesson that skill without exertion is of little avail, that labour is the lot of man, for the heart may conceive, and the head

devise in vain, if the hand be not prompt to execute the design. Later as a Mark Master Mason he learns that the Mallet is a moral emblem which teaches us to correct irregularities and aims at chewing us that by quiet deportment in the school of discipline he may attain to true contentment. What the Mallet is to the workman, the moralist goes on, enlightened reason is to the passions: it curbs ambition, represses envy, moderates anger, and encourages good dispositions. If it does all this may not one say with perfect truth that the Mallet is the symbol of what a Mason's life should be?

You will observe that, at the very outset, the Mallet is used to emphasise the importance, if not the dignity, of manual labour. "The heart may conceive, and the head devise in vain, if the hand be not prompt to execute the design." All over the world we find

illustrations of this great truth in the records in stone of our operative brethren. The mighty temples of the East, the sacred fanes of our own beloved land, may be said to owe all their magnificence and beauty to the imagination of the architects who conceived them, and yet they would have remained so many insubstantial dreams had the band of the humble craftsman not been ready to embody them in stone. As in the realm of matter so in the land of ideals. The genius of the race has indicated the foundations of the temples of Truth, Honour and Justice, has specified that the stones must be hewn from the quarries of Goodness and Virtue, but beyond this the genius of the race is powerless, and if the Temples rise to completion it will be by the active effort of each individual builder.

And by the obligations which he takes every Freemason is such a builder. Our Craft is a great

University of moral thought in which every one is a student. To some, it may be, the studies are unattractive. They matriculate, and having done so disappear, possibly to learn in other schools what would have been taught them in the Lodge as, after all, the Lodge but concerns itself with those things that are essential to all progress in Life. But if it be assumed that the Mason is anxious to pursue his calling, then within the confines of the Lodge he will find every encouragement towards higher things.

Moralising upon the Mallet he will learn to curb ambition, repress envy and moderate anger. Ambition within limits is a virtue, and he is a poor builder who lacks it, but the ambition that impels a man to disregard the feelings or the rights of others, or inspires him to seek only his own goals is that sin by which the angels fell. Reckless, unrestrained ambition

Is a flame

Blown by the winds of Pride that spareth not

Things lovely or things good;

and that is the kind of ambition which Freemasonry warns a brother to avoid. It has brought kings and princes of the earth to ruin and laid empires in the dust. It has imperiled immortal souls, and he who would guard against it must so discipline himself as to be able to respect the natural rights of his fellows.

The Mallet teaches us to repress Envy. Whether as a verb or a noun "envy" is an ugly word, denoting a condition of mind that no one should suffer who would enjoy the blessings of contentment. The dictionary describes it as "pain, grief, or annoyance felt at the happiness, success, or fortune of another; displeasure or grief aroused by the superiority of another accompanied with a certain degree of malice,

or malignity, or hatred, and a desire to depreciate or depress the person envied; a repining at the good or prosperity of another." The annals of Scottish operative masonry preserve a tradition which furnishes an apt illustration of Envy inflamed by the success that attended honourable Ambition. It concerns the famous Prentice Pillar in Roslin Chapel. That beautiful column, with its spirals of flowers and foliage winding down its clustered shaft, was, according to the legend, the work of an apprentice who was a better craftsman than his master. "The latter being unable to execute the design of the pillar from the plans furnished to him, had to go to Rome to examine a similar one there, and on his return found that his apprentice had, in his absence, overcome all difficulties and finished the work." The skillful youth, like the brilliant young craftsman who cut the keystone for the secret vault, was regarded with

immediate disfavour, and the master, instead of rejoicing at having trained such a workman, was overcome with jealous envy and killed the apprentice with a blow from his hammer. Other churches have their pillars round which lingers the same tradition, and in every department of life we have Envy exercising its baneful influence. The Freemason who would be true to the teaching of the Mallet will aim at living

high above the wrong

Of envy, or the bitterness of hate.

Envy should have no place in a Lodge that is sacred to friendship and brotherly love for it is opposed to these as Light is to Darkness, and as the tropical sun is to the eternal snows of the polar regions.

The Mallet teaches us to moderate anger. "Essentially anger is a virtuous emotion, planted in the breast to

intimidate and restrain wrong-doers; but through human infirmity, it is almost sure to be abused in one of four ways. A person under its influence may be hasty, passionate, fretful, or revengeful." And these are the weaknesses against which the Mason must guard. Longfellow has a striking line which says that "There is nothing so undignified as anger," and Thomson tells us that

*Senseless, and deformed,
Convulsive Anger storms at large; or pale,
And silent, settles into fell revenge.*

One may be moved to righteous anger by something done or something left undone but however justified one's wrath may be, it is wisdom to remember that

*'Tis the noblest mood
- That takes least hold on anger.*

A word employed by an angry man, or a sentence used in the heat of the moment, may be regretted for a lifetime and leave memories unhappy and unforgettable. Few men when they come to die can say they have nothing to regret, no word they would willingly withdraw, no angry moment they would willingly, forget if they had the power. The Craftsmen who would faithfully follow the teachings of our Order must subdue Anger and slay its twin-brothers Malice and Revenge. Where these rear their ugly heads there can be no friendship, and without friendship there can be no Freemasonry.

Finally, the Mallet is the emblem of authority. As is the sceptre to the King so is the Mallet to the Master. On that night which should be the proudest night in his Masonic life when a brother is placed in the chair of his Lodge he receives the Mallet from the Installing

Master as the last and highest touch of ceremonial. "I place in your hands the Mallet," says the installing officer. "It is the emblem of authority which you will use upon all necessary occasions. Its possession carries much power, with proportionate responsibility, but we feel sure that in your hands it will be wielded with discretion and wisdom so that order may be preserved in the Lodge."

The acceptance of the Mallet by a Master is an acknowledgment that the honour, the reputation, and the prosperity of the Lodge are in his keeping, and he is a poor master who does not so wield the symbol of authority as to impress upon the brethren the dignity and high importance of Freemasonry. He is enjoined by the ancient charge to consider as a pattern for his imitation the glorious luminary which regularly diffuses light and lustre to all, and if, in turn, he is to

be a pattern to his brethren he must curb ambition, repress envy, and moderate anger. The Mallet should set the tone for the Lodge. An inefficient, a careless or an unworthy master may do incalculable damage to the Craft, and will certainly fail to inspire the brethren to good deeds. Due caution should always be exercised therefore to see that the Mallet does not fall into thoughtless hands.

I have said that whatever form the Mallet may assume, or of whatever material it may be made, the moral lessons to be drawn from it are the same and I would add that whether it is wielded by the Master as a symbol of authority, or handled by an entered apprentice as a working tool, it is an emblem that illustrates the highest aims of our ancient Craft. Quaint Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromarty, an eccentric genius of the seventeenth century, wrote

much that has been forgotten, but left some striking phrases that have continued to live in the public mind. One of these crystallises into a sentence all the teaching of the Mallet and might be adopted as the motto of Masonry. It is: -

"Mean, Speak, and Do Well."

Let us strive to keep it in the forefront of our teaching. He who means well is not likely to speak ill, and he whose thought and utterance are in keeping with things that are lovely and of good report will not do anything unworthy of a Mason.

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