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SOME DIFFERENT SIMILARITIES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA RITUALS

THE WORKING TOOLS

by

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It is an odd subject really, for Masons to discuss, we in Victoria are most fortunate, not only do we have thirteen channels on T.V., but we have four distinct rituals practised here within easy reach. Yet some of us have never heard the other work, and yet people come as visitors to the various lodges in the two districts just to hear the Ancient Work, or the Emulation Work, and this makes it so much more interesting. Some of the remarks that I am going to make tonight are not so much the difference in the rituals in the lodges as they are presented in British Columbia, as the opportunity that we as Masons have to exercise a little mental judgement, mental exercise to try and appreciate and trace the origins of the work that is being presented to us.

At this point I would like to go back in time a little bit and think about some of the early races that have taken part in this wonderful work of Masonry. But before I get to that, I would just like to say that most of us have attended the various lodges, and watched the presentation of the working tools, which is simply one of the items that we are discussing tonight as a starting place to begin our considerations about the "Different Similarities," because the working tools are the basic symbols of a mason in lodge. They designate his origin as an operative mason, and they have carried through the traditions of masonry up until the present time. I think that we are all familiar, in general, in the various works, are very similar, but there are differences.

In the Canadian and Emulation work, the Canadian being largely taken from the Emulation, the working tools as we all know them, are the twenty-four inch gauge, the common gavel or mawl, and the chisel. In the Ancient or American work we have only the twenty-four inch gauge and the common gavel - we don't have the chisel. This is really not a difference - it is simply that as each working has evolved, in different areas, in different jurisdictions, some portions of the work appealed and others were dropped, and as the ritual went forward from mouth to mouth, certain things were changed. Mount Newton Lodge is a striking example, and we have often noted in Mount Newton, little things that creep in and change, because the Brethren come from different backgrounds, their education is different, they may be of different nationalities or different racial background, and thus they interpret the work slightly differently and the first thing you know these changes slip into the work. This is quite natural and is really not all bad, I am often pleased to realize that masonry and its rituals are a continually evolving thing.

When we go back into our libraries and read the ancient manuscripts, we find the key phrases still there, but we also find that the interpretation of certain words was inherent to the times in which those original rituals were presented. So in the Emulation and Canadian work in the second degree, our working tools are the square, the level and the plumb rule and strangely enough, in the Ancient work, whether there is any significance or not, but the order is reversed and the place of honour or the first mentioned, is the plumb rule,- the

square and the level. These are minute differences, but the main interest to me in listening to the presentation of the working tools and this is particularly true in the Canadian work, that the presentation is very complete, quite elaborate and a good deal of the lecture material in other degrees is incorporated in the presentation of the working tools. Whereas in many others, in our own lodge for instance, the

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presentation of the working tools is quite simple. In the third degree in the Emulation work, we have the skirret, the pencil and the compasses. This is common usage throughout much of the world. But when we get into the Ancient work, the main tool of the third degree is the trowel. Strange as it may seem while we talk of the trowel as binding and cementing the fraternity together in the bonds of freemasonry, the trowel was not only an instrument used by masons everywhere in assembling a building, but it actually was an instrument used in the lodge by the tyler as an instrument of defense. This is something that I think we should realize, that if we throw ourselves back into that period of time, we will realize that it wasn't likely that a Scottish mason, building churches in the bleak islands in the north of Scotland, would have such a thing as a sword. His instrument was his trowel and it was quite clearly pointed out that with his trowel, he was armed with the instrument of his office. It is an interesting point of the original work in many of the lodges and I think we are all familiar with it. I quote "In every age even monarchs themselves have been promoters of the art and have not thought it derogatory to their dignity to exchange the sceptre for the trowel". This phrase in the rituals speaks a great deal for the importance of the trowel in early masonry and show why it continues to be of such great importance in the Ancient work as still practiced today.

Working tools in every age, are the hallmark which attest to the degree of skill attained by any society or nation. Over the millenniums of time, in more cases than not, only the working tools remain, long after the people have disappeared. Archeologists now unearth those tools and from them, they can with remarkable accuracy, reconstruct the civilization of that day. The tools of the man designate his skills, his work, his knowledge and his dreams. We as masons probably realize better than most, the significance of the tools found, for we can trace the achievements of the toolmakers by the tools they made and used. The simple evolution of the club, for example, to an axe of stone was a traumatic advance. The original club was a primitive weapon of offence and defence; the axe or adze became a creative tool. Even the simplest tool extended the ability of the earliest craftsmen, to create images, carve canoes and shape stones for the builders use. More elaborate tools brought more refinement to our civilization and these advances brought writing, engraving, weaving, painting, sculpture and then as the world hurtled into one cultural and industrial explosion after another, we had printing, architecture, mathematics, engineering, astronomy, navigation, chemistry and on and on. All of these sciences are dependent upon the tools which enable man to exert the skills within himself.

I would just like to think for a moment about societies that we are familiar with in this part of the world and that is the Eskimo and our coast Indians. Let us take ourselves back into their history and legend and workings. While this in no way reflects on masonry, what I am trying to show is, that each group with specific aims, utilize the tools that enable them to be the people that they are.. They utilize those tools in the symbolism of their race. Let us consider the working tools that could be compared by their cultures, to the working tools that we as masons accept.

To do that, let our minds lead us into a great Eskimo igloo. The chief

sits on a tremendous white bearskin and presents the working tools of his craft to the young men gathered round. They are the polished runner; the glistening harpoon; and the humble snow knife. In my mind's eye I can hear him say:- "Not only the tactical or every day use of these tools within the tribe, but also to draw some allusion as to the significance of these symbols to the tribe. For instance, "The Polished Runner" is an instrument made use of by Eskimo families to take their goods from place to place, but we, as brethren of the north, may visualize taking our worldly goods to share and the knowledge we have gained, to our brother across the far flung wastes. The "Glistening Harpoon" is the means of sustenance of our people, but it also can show that we can strike the minds of man, with new thoughts, with new teaching and ever be the leaders in the minds of northern man. Then there is the "Humble Snow Knife" which in the hands of skilled craftsmen can erect an architecturally perfect dome from nature's simplest building material - snow. It teaches us to never belittle the skills of others, but to utilize our own for the greatest comfort and survival of all."

Or we might visit the great wooden hut of a coastal Indian tribe where the chief sits on a raised cedar dais and presents the young warriors with their ancestral tools. Even now, as I sit in my imagination, in that smoke filled lodge, I see him present - "The Obsidian Adze" the "Cedar Root Wedge" and the "Bone Needle". He exhorts the young men that with the adze they are empowered to create the great canoes which allow them to cross the coastal waters. Also with the adze, it gives them the responsibility of leading others, of teaching and so continuing the work of their ancestors and their ancestors' ancestors. The "Cedar Root Wedge" is a simple, tapered, tough cedar root, which the early craftsmen used to split the great cedar logs into the planks of which they built their lodges and their lodgings. It is a simple tool but so real in the hands of those people in the time in which they worked. I close my eyes and hear him say:-"This wedge illustrates the capability of splitting from the parent tree, a part, a plank, which together with others can be made into a new whole. We teach you, here and now to realize, that as you split from the parent tree to build and rebuild and ever form stronger and stronger ties with your past;. Now I present the "Bone Needle", it seems a simple tool and yet, for primitive man wherever he lived, it was the difference between life and death from exposure to harsh climes. It sewed his garments, it made his tents and helped him in the construction of many of his articles." Again the chief would naturally point out the great practical uses of the needle and the sinew, ending with such words as this - "Even as with this needle and sinew the skins may be bound to bring comfort to the members of the tribe; so in the sense of the philosophy of our people, may you bind one brother to another with the sinews of friendship:."

Brethren, I have given you these, my thoughts, for your consideration and may I close by saying - the first impressions of the masonic art is that it is a very complex system of moral teachings and is full of contradictions, but brethren, a careful student of the teachings of masonry comes to realize that the more likely answer, is that masons within the order contradict one another. Our backgrounds lead each one to draw different conclusions from the presentation of any masonic ritual but these very different similarities are what make masonry the interesting study that it will always be - till time shall be no more.