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DDGM Talks

Talk Number 13

Title: The Square

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## THE SQUARE

At my Official Visit to Amity Lodge No. 32, I announced a trilogy of talks prepared by Bro. Sheldon Kofsky and myself on the three Great Lights of Masonry. Bro. Kofsky presented a paper on the significance and symbolism of the Volume of the Sacred Law. This evening I wish to present Part II, "The Square".

Any person entering a Masonic Craft Lodge will notice in the centre of the room an Altar. On this Altar is a Bible or more correctly a "Volume of the Sacred Law", for in its certain situations it might be a Loran, an Old Testament or a Vedas depending on the makeup of the Lodge membership itself. When the Lodge is "at work", the Volume of the Sacred Law is open on the altar, and upon it lie the Square and Compasses. These are the three Great Lights of Masonry.

The Square and Compasses are the oldest, the simplest and the most universal symbols of Masonry. All the world over, whether as a sign on a building, or as a badge worn by a Brother, even the non-Mason knows them to be emblems of our Ancient Craft.

Some years ago, a business firm tried to adopt the Square and Compasses as a trademark. The Patent Office refused permission, on the grounds, as the decision said, and I quote, "There can be no doubt that this device, so commonly worn and employed by Masons, has an established mystic significance, universally recognized as existing. Whether it is comprehended

by all or not, is not material to the issue". The Square and Compasses therefore belong to us, by the associations of history and by the tongue of common report.

Nearly everywhere in our Ritual, as in the public mind, the Square and the Compasses are seen together, the one suggests the other, and that is as it should be, because the things they represent are interwoven.

However, let us separate them for the moment for further study. There is no need to say that the Square we have in mind is not a cube, which has four equal sides and angles, and deemed by the Greeks a figure of perfection. Nor is it the square of the carpenter which has one leg longer than the other and is marked off in inches for measuring. It is rather a small plain square, unmarked, with legs of equal length—a simple try square used for testing the accuracy of angles, and the precision with which stones are cut.

Since the try-square was used to prove that angles were right, it naturally became an emblem of accuracy, of integrity and of rightness. As stones are cut to fit into a building, so our acts and thoughts are built together into a structure of Character, and they too must be tested by a mortal standard of which the simple try-square is a symbol.

Thus, among Speculative masons, the tiny try-square has always been a symbol of morality, a test of the basic rightness of every act and the foundation of character and society.

History informs us that near Limerick, in 1830, the Deputy Provincial Grand Master of North and East Yorkshire recovered a very curious relic—in the form of an old brass Square found under the foundation of an ancient bridge. On it was inscribed the date 1517, along with the following words:

***Strive to live with love and care  
Upon the Level, by the Square.***

In truth, the Square rules the Mason as well as the Lodge, for consider this:

- (a) A brother takes square steps around the square pavement of a rectangular Lodge.
- (b) When a Brother is first brought to light, he beholds the Square on the Volume of the Sacred Law on the altar, and at the same time sees that it is worn by the Worshipful Master of the Lodge, as an emblem of his office.
- (c) In the FC degree he is received on the Square and at the Altar his arm forms a Square, and also
- (d) In the East he sees the rough and perfect ashlar (the change being wrought with the assistance of the square).

The Brother is constantly reminded that square conduct and square thought, in act as well as in word, is the bottom line of Masonry, for masonry is not simply a Ritual; it is a way of living. Each of us has in his own heart a Try-Square called a Conscience, and we use it to square our lives and actions—so

do we improve our own personal life and the lives of those around us—and that to me is our fundamental purpose.

The poem “On the Square”, I believe, captures my message this evening;

**It matters not whate'er your lot or what your task may  
be,  
One duty there remains for you,  
One duty stands for me.  
Be you a doctor skilled and wise  
Or do you work for wage  
A labourer upon the street  
An artist on the stage;  
One glory still waits for you,  
One glory that is fair,  
To have men say as you pass by:  
“That fellow's on the Square”.**

**Ah, here's a phrase that stands for much  
'Tis good old English too;  
It means that men have confidence  
In everything you do.  
It means that what you have you've earned,  
And that you've done your best,  
And when you go to sleep at night  
Untroubled you may rest.  
It means that conscience is your guide  
And honour is your care;**

**There is no greater praise than this;  
“That fellow’s on the Square!”**

W. Bro. Tom Fannon, thank you for the opportunity to speak openly and thank you brethren for your time and attention this evening. Take care.