

## *Chapter 11*

### *Where The Stones Are Raised*

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*Centralize, centralize, centralize. Pattern Freemasonry after Washington bureaucracy. Let nothing be done modestly by an individual or a Lodge; do everything on state or national level the super-duper way. Make a great to-do about local self-government, but accept no local self-responsibility.*

**AFTER MOSES HAD** safely conducted the Children of Israel through the Red Sea when pursued by Pharaoh and his hosts, he then, by divine command, erected a tabernacle and set it due East and West . . .

The time was some 1,400 years before the Christian era. It was 480 years before the foundations for the Temple of Solomon were laid on Mount Moriah. The long, bitter years of Egyptian bondage were over. The wanderings in the wilderness were just beginning.

To comprehend the true import of this incident in Old Testament lore, we must try to picture a simple, nomadic people, living in tents, their livelihood dependent largely upon flocks and herds. Their civilization, although crude in technology and the arts, was advanced in religion. We are not surprised to read, then, that soon after the Exodus, preparations were begun for the construction of a holy place in which to worship the Most High.

Only the select ones—the descendants of Levi— were permitted to engage in this great work. The Gershonites had charge of the furnishings: the fabrics, the curtains and cords and hangings. The Merarites had charge of the physical plant: the boards and the pillars, the bars and sockets and pins. The Kohathites had charge of the priestly functions: the altar and the candlesticks, the table of shewbread, the holy vessels and, most important of all, the Ark of the Covenant wherein rested the tablets of the law.

**SIX MONTHS THEY SPENT** erecting that pastoral shrine of Sinai. And when the time came for the dedication of the tabernacle, great preparations were made for transporting the offerings from each of the tribes. It was what the army would call a problem in logistics.

So lavish were the gifts that Moses ordered the use of wagons and oxen to bear them. But he made one significant exception: only the Gershonites and the Merarites were permitted to use wagons, and only to carry secular materials. The Kohathites, responsible for the holy objects now consecrated for the adoration of Jehovah, were forbidden to transport their burdens by wagon. The Revised Version tells the story in these words:

*But to the sons of Kohath he gave none, because they were charged with the care of*

*holy things which had to be carried on the shoulder.1*

Thus was it decreed even in that dim, far-off era of human development that those things which are sacred and precious, those things which lift mankind to heights of true nobility, must be guarded and preserved by our own muscle and blood and sweat.

The Ark of the Covenant must be carried on the shoulders of men.

**ALMOST FIVE HUNDRED** years later, at the quarries in the northeast quarter of Jerusalem near the Damascus gate, a vast labor force was at work. By the most laborious of processes, yet with infinite patience and skill, 80,000 Fellow Crafts were removing building stone from the place of its underground deposit.

By means of crude wooden rollers 70,000 Entered Apprentices moved the completed blocks from the quarries to the Temple site on Mount Moriah. Perhaps the immense masses could have been transported in their rough and unfinished state, but that was not the practice. Each stone was hewn, squared and numbered in the quarry where it was raised. Individually, block by block, each received the careful attention of skilled hands.<sup>2</sup> And the work was done with so high a degree of perfection that when those blocks arrived at their place each one "fitted with such exactness that it had more the appearance of being the handiwork of the Supreme Architect of the Universe, than that of human hands."

On many occasions I have walked alongside the working area surrounding Washington Cathedral, high on Mount St. Alban in the nation's capital. There I have seen blocks of Indiana limestone, hewn, squared and numbered in some Lawrence or Monroe County quarry. Precision tools have replaced the mallet and chisel, yet each individual block still must be fashioned by the hands of a skilled craftsman in a mill near the quarry site—and the completed blocks must fit in their places with the same degree of exactness. From a literal standpoint the basic methods of operative masons have not changed too much.

But when we begin to speak figuratively of the methods of speculative Masons—that is a different story.

**NOW, WHY HAVE** I gone into such detail to recount two episodes from the Old Testament?

The reason should be plain, I believe. The Sons of Kohath were not permitted to transport objects that were sacred and precious by wagon. Holy things had to be carried on the shoulders of men— *the hard way*. Stones for the Temple of Solomon were prepared individually, hewn, squared and numbered in the quarries where they were raised— *the hard way*.

Perhaps that is an over-simplified way of describing the designs on our speculative trestleboard, and yet, is not our grand aim just about as simple as that?

When American Freemasonry begins to adapt our industrial "know-how" to the slow

and patient process of making a Mason so as to accomplish it in three evenings at the most; when we neglect the individual, cease to spend any time on him or devote any attention to him, permit him to shift for himself and eventually to become swallowed up in a huge, impersonal crowd—then, I maintain, we are failing miserably in our task.

And when we look upon the individual petitioner for the three degrees merely as a check in payment of a fee, or as a potential member of another organization, we are prostituting our noble Craft to the basest of uses.

NOW, I AM SURE I hear someone protesting that all this is very good from an academic standpoint. But Americans are pragmatic, says my critic; we must not waste our time and thought on things idealistic; we must concern ourselves only with that which will "work." Very well, then, let's take a quick glance at the lengths to which our practical philosophies have brought us:

—Look at the incredible ideas now being proposed to "make over" our Craft to fit some other pattern. M.W. Harold D. Ross, when Grand Master of Masons in Illinois, recognized the watering-down process all too clearly. To his Grand Lodge he related how "countless solutions have been proposed to me . . . such as omitting the learning of the catechism, classes of candidates, conferring all three degrees in one night, and (believe it or not) three black cubes instead of one for rejection." Then he went on to observe: "It may well be that our numbers will continue to lessen until we are a hard core of earnest, sincere, devoted men committed to the principle that brotherly love, more than any other single human experience, is the greatness of mankind."

—Those who occupy positions of leadership in our Lodges are nearing the place where they can no longer think for themselves nor use the brains the Great Architect has given them. We have come to depend so much on centralized activity and standardized forms that individual imagination is unthinkable. I am constantly appalled at the requests I receive for some kind of "canned" program or ceremony for the most elementary of Lodge functions.

—Look how far we have gone already in the direction of centralization and standardization:

Lodge minutes have long since ceased to have any individuality; they have taken the easy course of prefabricated monotony. Floor plans for Masonic halls have settled down into a dull sameness; rarely do we see anything distinctive or creative. Even our temple designs are beginning to achieve a standardized effect. Who knows?—perhaps some day we will be able to identify a Masonic Temple just as readily as a Howard Johnson restaurant!

Masonic education programs, well meaning though they may be, are beginning to resemble a nationally advertised vitamin pill which claims to contain everything. Looking over the nation at all such standard products, I find little to set me on fire and much to leave me cold. In far too many instances the packages are pitifully lacking in imagination, with little or nothing to offer except the reprinting of old booklets, the production of new

booklets and the staging of dreary and lugubrious group meetings—a kind of dual epidemic of bookletitis and workshopitis. What happens when a Lodge is thoughtless enough to have its own peculiar set of problems not covered by the neatly catalogued "Plans" and "Programs"? Does it have to wait until its ailment becomes a standard one so it can qualify for the standard treatment? In the last few years I have seen countless examples of how hungry Lodges are for challenging ideas to meet their *individual* needs, and how enthusiastically they respond to *individual* attention, but I have seen few signs of any intelligent effort to capitalize on that hunger and that enthusiasm.

Small wonder our Lodges make use of mass methods when they see their Grand Lodge leadership using the same technique.

Yes, and ritualistic instruction, if we are not careful, will descend to the level of the fussy old drill sergeant I used to know in college who would spend the entire 50-minute period, day in and day out, rehearsing the exact manner of doing squads right.

**CERTAINLY THERE ARE** circumstances under which Lodges should do things the same way, and occasions when both Lodges and individual Brethren should act together as a unit. One such occasion comes twice a year with the Feasts of St. John. Another such occasion, in Indiana, is the annual Pilgrimage to the Masonic Home. The ceremonies of the three degrees always should be *basically* uniform—though certainly not to the point of being ridiculous. A certain amount of centralization and standardization is necessary for efficient and effective operation.

But it is so easy to go overboard—and it seems to be the besetting sin of Americans to go overboard. Whatever the current trend may be, we become obsessed with it. In the Hoosier vernacular, we go "hog wild."

Consider for a moment where centralization and standardization can lead us:

**1. They contribute to a deadening mediocrity.** I love some of those personal comments written by Secretaries on the annual returns of Lodges a century and more ago. They lend flavor to what otherwise would be a dull statistical report. The late George A. Avery, Grand Secretary of Pennsylvania, once told me of examining the original minute book of a Lodge almost two centuries old. Two pages were pasted together. Brother Avery and his associates were consumed with curiosity to know what profound secret might be hidden between those two pages. With great effort and no little expense, a firm of specialists was able to loosen the glue without damaging the pages . . . and then to their delight they read the news of the day written in a childish scrawl: "Sister has a new pair of drawers."

(At least it was different, and far more interesting than the standard form for Lodge minutes.)

**2. They smother ambition, initiative, imagination, vision.** I have reached the place that I glory in the Lodge which tries to hold on to a bit of individuality no matter how eccentric it may be. Nine Indiana Lodges (bless them!) still meet on or before the full moon. One Lodge has a provision in its by-laws that so long as that

Lodge exists it will use three burning tapers, and nothing else, for its Lesser Lights—blessings on it! Once in awhile I visit a Lodge hall which has doors at unorthodox places, and it always makes me want to give three rousing cheers, for at least that Lodge is registering a silent protest against sameness!

**3. They stifle the spirit and limit the scope of Masonic charity.** Space does not permit me to develop this theme except to say that unquestionably here is an area in which we fall far short of the mark in doing the work of our Craft. If ever there was a subject on which serious thinking needed to be done, it is this.

**4. They seek to take the easy way.** And I maintain that Freemasonry must operate the *hard way* if it is to be of any effect. It must deal with individuals, and not masses; with Lodges, and not groups of Lodges. All over Indiana, and all over America, Lodges need individual attention—and here I mean something beyond routine ritualistic instruction. They need the *personal interest* of their leaders. They need inspiration, encouragement, challenge. But they need it *individually*—not some standard product sent out from a central office packaged and labeled with a trade name.

**5. They repudiate the basic philosophy of Freemasonry.** The stones for the Temple, erected for the adoration of the Most High, were hewn, squared and numbered in the quarries where they were raised. Tell me, if you can, what labor-saving device is there that is of any effect in the development of the immortal soul of a man?

The working tools of a Mason are designed for the use of *only one man at a time*.

The seeker after Light plucks off his shoe—individually.

He affirms his trust in God—individually. He comes face to face with destitution—alone. He stands in the Northeast Comer—individually.

He goes forth in search of That Which Was Lost—alone.

He retires to the Sanctum Sanctorum to pray—alone.

He meets the test of fidelity—alone.

He is raised to newness of life—individually and alone.

Andre Gide said it in words few in number but powerful in their impact: "Man is more important than men. God made *him* and not *them* in His image. Each one is more precious than all." When we seek to circumvent personal interest and attention, to cast every Freemason in a standard mold and send him to the shipping room on a conveyor belt, then we deny the dignity of the individual and abandon our lofty mission.

*We had better think it through.*

I never fail to be lifted to new heights by those thrilling words of the late A. Whitney Griswold, President of Yale University: "Could *Hamlet* have been written by a

committee, or the *Mono Lisa* painted by a club? Could the New Testament have been composed as a conference report? Creative ideas do not spring from groups. The divine spark leaps from the finger of God to the finger of Adam."

No, there are no short cuts, no mass production techniques, that can make a perfect ashlar out of a rough ashlar.

The stones for the Temple must be hewn, squared and numbered in the quarries where they are raised.

The Ark of the Covenant must be carried on the shoulders of men.

1 Numbers 3: 25-36; 7: 9.

2 I Kings 6:7.