

Contemporary Mystic Christianity **Bible Self-Study Supplement**

Laying the Corner Stone

Thus the great day arrived when the corner stone should be laid and the divine work begin. A. T. Thorpe has described this occasion most vividly in his *Masonic Papers*, from which we quote the following:

At length the day arrived when the Corner Stone of the Temple was to be laid with solemn ceremony by King Solomon.

All morning long, all over the kingdom over which Solomon ruled, the priests were busy with sacrificial devotions. All over the land the various Masonic Lodges were in session, save only on and immediately about Mount Moriah itself, and every Mason, of high and low degree alike, was within the tyler-guarded spaces, those alone excepted who were soon to serve in the immediate forms and ceremonies on the mountain's top. All the morning, guards and soldiers brilliantly clad moved to and fro in large companies and in small, while officials more dazzlingly garbed, carried messages here and there. Men of all ranks and classes, all occupations and callings, and of every nationality known mingled in the eager assembly. Rarely has so great a gathering, satisfied and peaceful and happy — so far as an observer might judge — been congregated

around one favoured spot, ready for a duty so significant and important.

An hour before high twelve, Solomon rode out to the foot of the mountain. He was accompanied by a numerous guard in costly armour and magnificently mounted, and by a great number of authorities and officials of his own land, and ministers and ambassadors from other kingdoms. At the foot of the mountain he dismounted from his horse. His guard drew back a little and he came forward on, foot and alone. Hiram Abiff advanced and met him and clothed him, with the spotless lambskin of Masonry. A third brother great in skill and high in rank, chosen to stand for the day in the place of the absent Tyrian king, came and took his place by the side of Hiram and Solomon.

Rapidly and with great regularity a mighty procession disengaged itself from the throng of non-Masonic onlookers. There were thousands in the mighty line of aproned men, and they left other thousands thronging the scene as they moved out and away-and up.

The procession was a long one, for every Lodge in the world had representatives there. It would have been grand to have had all the Masons there in line, but it was not so. The body of the Craft was assembled in their own Lodge so that the effect of the whole ceremonial might be more impressive than any other plan could have rendered

possible. So then did the Craft go up to the great foundation builded about Mount Moriah, and Hiram Abiff walked in honor among the Craft.

A temporary arch of stone, designed for permanent service in another place and at a later time, had been erected at the point where the procession would enter upon, the artificial platform of polished stone. Arrived there, the lines opened to the right and left, the Brethren bowed themselves upon their knees and the two Grand Masters with the Deputy of the third, passed through and along the floor until they came to a temporary platform of bronze raised one step above the level. Here they paused. This step they took. Then the Brethren rose to their feet, marched forward again, and formed in a predetermined order about the platform. Within, nearest the platform, the Brethren stood in a hollow square, outside the square there was made an, equilateral triangle of men, and still beyond, a mighty circle of Masons swept away until they stood almost on the edge of the Temple area, and Hiram Abiff was the point within the circle from which every man in the outer circle was equally distant. After a moment or two of expressive pause, during which the great artist Hiram Abiff, astronomer as well as architect, faced the south, he turned to Solomon in the east and said quietly, "It is just high twelve."

When he had spoken, Solomon raised his right hand and with a gavel of ebony having a handle of ivory, struck once on the great Corner Stone that lay before him. The silence that fell upon the mountain was unbroken by the sound of a breath-it was as deep and perfect as before the time when life began in the new earth. Below on the slopes of the mountain, in the valleys at its foot, in the great cities, everywhere, the same solemn hush had fallen. But hark! What was that — and that — **and that?** The rhythmic beat of wood upon stone, strong, steady and vigorous; now near, now receding, and soon so far away as to mock the attention that would have followed it unto the silence. Every Master in every Lodge within the hearing of Solomon's blow had answered with a blow from the gavel he held in his hand. Those who had not heard Solomon strike, but had heard those blows answered to his, gave like answer in their turn, and so the signal flew from hill to valley, from valley to hill again, on and on wherever Lodges were, wherever God's free air vibrated, wherever Mason's hearts were willing and Mason's arms were ready. The signal of Masonry's might commanding attention of the universe, had gone out to all the earth: On to the east, to the south, to the west, and even to the way of the dark north. On until they listened at the forges and furnaces of the clay-grounds. On until the commanders of the new, y arrived boats at Joppa heard. On and on — the echo of that blow is

sounding yet. That sacred sound will never fade and never die.

"We have met", said Solomon, "to prove that we love God and to know that the wealth He has given us is but held in our hands as a sacred trust from Him, and to demonstrate that the talents He has endowed us with are wisely consecrated to His service." He turned to the great stone, a massive cube without mark or cut of any sort, and added slowly and thoughtfully, "We have come to put in, place the greatest cornerstone of the greatest Temple ever raised to any God. I foresee that our successors, the Freemasons of the coming ages, will imitate this example of ours many times. I see that within the stones they lay, or in carefully prepared receptacles beneath them, they will place appropriate memorials, they will carve names and years upon the stones.

"Hiram Abiff proposed the name of the king to be engraven upon this stone. I proposed the name of the architect. We debated one against the other until his happy thoughts suggested the name of God. Brethren, God has written His name upon the mountains, has carved it upon the mountains, has cut it upon the ledges that cut the waters and turn them back upon themselves, has marked it upon field, flower, shrub and forest, has lettered it upon the cloud and on, the sunshine, on the calm and the tempest,

on the lightning of His wrath and on the cloud-set bow of His promise, and he has engraven it on the heart of man and speaketh to his soul by its greatness. He needeth no name set in stone. consequently, brethren, we set this sacred stone nameless.

"What could we place here for the stone to guard: A handful of pieces of gold? The gold of all the earth found and hidden is His in whose name we place this stone. Shall we place here sacred writings? Shall we make it true that he only shall gain them who overturneth the Temple? Against that loss wisdom hath otherwise provided, and he that hideth needlessly a copy of truth delayeth the getting of wisdom and putteth souls in jeopardy.

"Shall we deposit the documents of Masonry? It has none. It is the prophecy of great things to come, the promise of mighty events, the germ of giant truths, the beginning of glorious manhood; but today, it is only a little child with empty hands. Brethren, on this solid stone we lay this solid stone — nameless, dateless — empty."

Solomon then took corn and scattered it upon the stone saying: "Let It be upon him and his undertakings, upon his officers and his men, upon his nation and his people and upon all regular Masons forever." Then to the music of many instruments, the solemn chant from hundreds of

voices, the workmen let the great Stone down into its place.

Hiram, Abiff took the plumb, the square and the level and gave them to Solomon. The king kept the square, gave the level to the strong man who represented the King of Tyre, and returned the plumb to Hiram, "Keep it until the Temple is completed."

Solomon then tried the Stone at every angle and turning to the four corners of the heavens pronounced it square.

King Hiram's deputy laid the level along every edge and the bottom and the top, and looking to the front and the rear, to the left and the right, he pronounced it level.

Hiram Abiff applied his jewel (the Compass and the Square with the letter G enclosed) to the several edges of the Foundation Stone and looking to the earth below him and to the heavens above, cried aloud that he found it plumb.

Solomon then took corn and scattered it upon the stone saying: "Let plenty be In this land and among this people and with all true members of the Fraternity and in the lands and homes and nations of all faithful servants of the one true God."

When the king scattered corn, so every Master of every Lodge whose place of meeting on hill or in valley was in view of the king scattered corn from his hand likewise; and those beyond them, ready and watchful, scattered corn in their turn, and beyond these, others. And so the thing was done, the message widened. The corn from the hands of Masters fell in every Lodge in which Masons were, and when the cry of responses ran along the land, the sailors on the sea afar off bent their ears and listened.

The Tyrian King's substitute poured the precious wine, saying: "Joy follow all who are of us and with us. Gladness be their share in the earth. May the Universal Ruler make all tribes and nations one, and come to reign over a world united in friendship and brotherly love."

The wine flashed in the sunshine and in every Lodge far and near, and the thunder of the great response seemed to make Mount Moriah rock.

Hiram the builder, the widow's son, advanced and poured the fragrant oil. "May peace be", he cried, "from the east to the west, from one place to the other. May the Master of the Lodge unseen shelter and protect the widow and the widow's son, and all to whom adversity turns its cruel power. May defence be for danger, relief for want, good for evil, or the shadow thereof, and universal peace be sure and speedy."

Oil then fell from the hand in the west in every place where Masons met upon the level, and the roar of the response had the seeming of a voice from beyond the stars.

Solomon then offered prayer again, his face turned toward the west down which the setting sun was swiftly declining, and the Brethren made response. Then he smote three times upon the stone with the gavel which he held and the blows were repeated near and far as the former one had been. It was as though his kingly hand had stirred the center of a silent pool, while every Masonic heart and hand owned itself a ready drop in the responsive waters thereof.

The procession then formed again and the line marched down the mountain side, and having found a place by themselves in a valley, it being the same place from which they had set out in the morning. The Grand Lodge was closed and the Brethren dispersed.

The sun was setting as they went out among the people again, but so great were Solomon's domains, and so slowly does sound travel from man to man, that the darkness was great and the hour late ere the words of the last response — the answers to the last gavel blows on Mount Moriah — had faded into solemn silence on his farthest frontiers.

— ***Corinne Heline***