

The 5 Minute Mason: The Story of a Stone

An eminent sculptor was once asked: "How do you carve such beautiful statues?" He replied, "It is the simplest thing in the world. I take a hammer and chisel and from a massive, shapeless rock, I knock off all the stone I don't want or need, and there is the statue. It was there all the time."

In our ritual we are taught that the Rough Ashlar "is a stone as taken from the quarry in its rude and natural state" and that the Perfect Ashlar "is a stone made ready by the hands of the workman, to be adjusted by the working tools of the Fellow Craft." The Rough Ashlar was not a stone that was merely picked up somewhere. It was a stone that had been selected. Some work was done upon it, but it was apparently a pretty good stone to start with. It was a stone that showed some good prospects of being made into a Perfect Ashlar. If it had not been a good stone, it never would have made it out of the quarry.

So it is with a prospective member. He cannot be merely picked up somewhere. He must be selected. Before he is ready to be initiated some work must be done upon him. He must stand certain basic tests. He must be apparently of good material. He must be a man who shows good prospects of becoming a good Mason. If he had not been a good man, he should never have been proposed for membership.

In changing a Rough Ashlar into a Perfect Ashlar, the workman takes away but never adds to. He chips and chips and he cuts away the rough edges. He removes the visible flaws and takes that which is already there and molds and helps it develop it into a Perfect Ashlar.

The stone, from which the Venus de Milo was carved by an unknown sculptor of ancient times, lay perhaps for a thousand years in the rocks of the Island Milo. An unknown workman may have cut a huge piece of marble from the quarry, but it took a master artisan to carve out the beautiful statue. It took a good piece of marble and a skilled artist to produce the Venus de Milo.

No operators in Masonry can make a Perfect Ashlar. So there are no perfect Masons in our Lodges. In our Ritualistic and other work, we can take away much of the roughness, remove the sharp points and obliterate the visible defects. We can produce as good a Mason as there is within our power to produce. But you have to have good material upon which to work.

I believe this statement is applicable to all of mankind, but to us as Symbolic Masons, it is filled with meaning. For, was not each one of us, who at the start of our Masonic career, was placed in the Northeast corner as an example stone. The stone so placed that it would, in the fullness of time, be wrought into a thing of beauty acceptable to the builder?

These are very true words. Our kit of tools contains those talents with which God has blessed us to enable us to fulfil our mission in life. We are told in the Volume of Sacred Law that one man received five talents, another, two talents, and yet another, only one talent, so that our duty is for each to discharge his allotted task to the best of his ability, and help those who have not been so well blessed as himself. Thus each will be assisted in carving out the "Grand Design" of being happy and communicating happiness and thereby become more "serviceable to his fellow creatures."

Over the past 12 years I've been blessed to be able to create nearly 80 educational 'nuggets from the quarry'. Every time I sit with my laptop trying to form my research and thoughts into an informative, and hopefully thought provoking program, I manage to kill off a huge mass of brain cells....and they don't seem to regenerate as fast as they used to. I searched for and found some appropriate words about creating a stone:

*I find it quite odd that a Prince or a King,
Or even a clown that plays in the sawdust ring,
And all the common folk like you and me
Are really builders for all of eternity?*

*Each one of us is given a kit of tools,
A shapeless mass and a book of rules:
And each must create, before his life has flown;
Either a stumbling block or a stepping stone.*

(L. Sharpe)

A portion adapted from the writings of Bro. J. Fairbain Smith (1979), with permission GL of Texas



... The 5 Minute Mason: #79 in a series of nuggets from the Quarry of Freemasonry.SM

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