

The symbols of Speculative Masonry may be divided into three classes.

*First:* Those which belong exclusively to it as the offspring of a society of operative builders, and which could have been adopted by no association which did not have such a connection. Such are the implements of Masonry, the square, the level, the plumb, and all the other working tools of the stone-masons, which the Speculative Masons have spiritualized. The interpretation of these symbols is arbitrary, and we need not go outside of the operative art, which gave them birth, to find it. We must, therefore, as a general rule, consider the Masonic explanation of the working tools, as settled in the ordinary ritual and incapable of improvement. Yet this is not always the case. Take for instance the *square* and *compasses*. These undoubtedly come to us from our Operative predecessors, and the purposes for which they used them in the construction of buildings has been symbolically applied by the Speculatives to the erection of their spiritual edifice. But if we look into the Hermetic Philosophy of the Middle Ages, we will find that the square and compasses were also prominent symbols—the compasses of the male, and the square of the female principle—that is, of the active and the passive powers of nature. These symbols always were combined and were subordinated to the Creative mind. Now, the fact that in Freemasonry the square and compasses are always found together and, that they rest on the Holy Writings, the symbol of God, shows a coincidence between the Hermetic and the Masonic symbolism that is worth investigating. Such an investigation would be appropriate to an Academy of Instruction. Without at all changing the received Masonic interpretation of these symbols, the symbolism might be traced through the Hermetic philosophy away back to the Phallic worship of the ancients, which was simply the recognition of the active and passive principles in creation. Considered in this enlarged way, how much more interesting to the Masons must these symbols become—symbols so prominent, that they have been recognized by common consent as the insignia of the Order, presenting themselves on the most ordinary occasions, even as decorations of the person to the eyes of every member of the Fraternity.

*Secondly:* There is another class of symbols which have no exclusive connection with Masonic ideas, but which rather belong to the universal science of symbolism and have simply been appropriated by and adapted to that of Speculative Masonry. These symbols are originally derived from the mystic associations of the ancients, from the schools of Alexandria and of Pythagoras, from the Druids, the Eleusinians or later still, in the Middle Ages, from the Gnostics, the Rosicrucians and the Hermetic Philosophers. Of this class of symbols we may cite as examples, the ceremonies of discalceation and of circumambulation, and for visible symbols, the lights, the cable-tow, the theological ladder, and many others.

For illustration let us refer briefly to each of these in the order in which they have been named.

The ceremony of discalceation is very unsatisfactorily disposed of in the first degree by a reference to the Israelitish custom described in the Book of Ruth, while no explanation is offered of the higher form of discalceation which occurs in the third degree. But enquiry shows us that this rite is to be traced to remote times in the oriental parts of the world, where uncovering the feet was always practised on entering a holy place. "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." Primarily then this symbol must be interpreted as an enunciation of the idea that the lodge is holy. We may retain the teaching of the ritual in the first degree that the shoe is the symbol of a contract, but transfer the higher thought of holiness to the same symbol in the third degree, and thus we supply to Masonry an interpretation that it has always been without.

The rite of circumambulation receives a very unsatisfactory explanation in the accepted ritual. We do not elevate the dignity of the ceremony by appropriating it to the humble purpose of a personal inspection of the candidate by the members of the lodge. But the truth is that this rite of circumambulation, the act of passing around the altar in a particular direction, is one of the oldest of religious observances. The direction of the procession around the sacred precinct with the right hand always towards the altar or holy place was made in allusion to the course of the sun and was derived from the ancient sun worship. In an Academy of Instruction, the sun, as a prominent symbol in Masonry, would be duly considered and the rite of circumambulation being referred to this solar system it would be shown that the ceremony had a more important signification than that attributed to it in the ritual. A wide and interesting field of historical research would thus be opened, the study of which would result only in the elevation of the science of Masonic symbolism, by demonstrating its connection with that of the ancient mystic associations and religious ordinances. Then we have the symbol of the three lights, which brings us again to the solar symbolism of the ancients. There is evidently some allusion to this in the explanation of the lights which is given in the ritual; but the symbolic interpretation has been