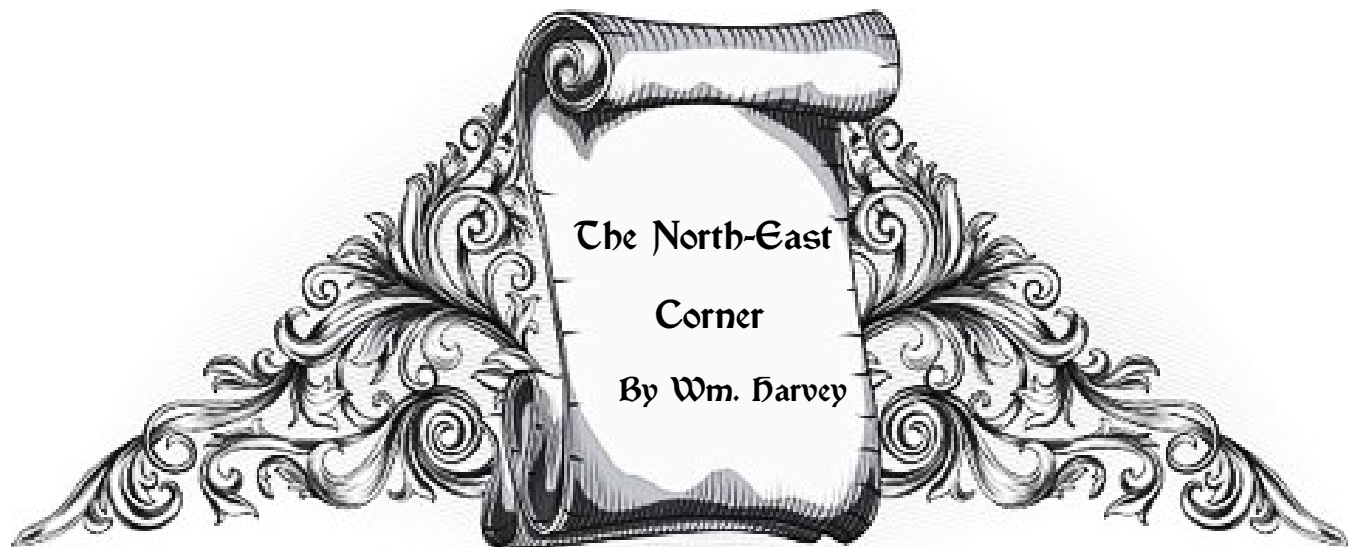




The North East Corner



fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland;
Ex-Pres-Dundee and District R.W.M.'s and P.M.'s Assn. ;

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Charter Mem. Dundee St. Mary No. 11'9; W. Sub. M. Ubique, Dundee, No. 1192;

Hon. Mem. No. 6, R.A.; Hon. Mem. No. 164, R.A; P. H., No. 271, R.A.;

Hon. Mem. No. 416, R.A.; founder and first Principal No. 421, R.A.;

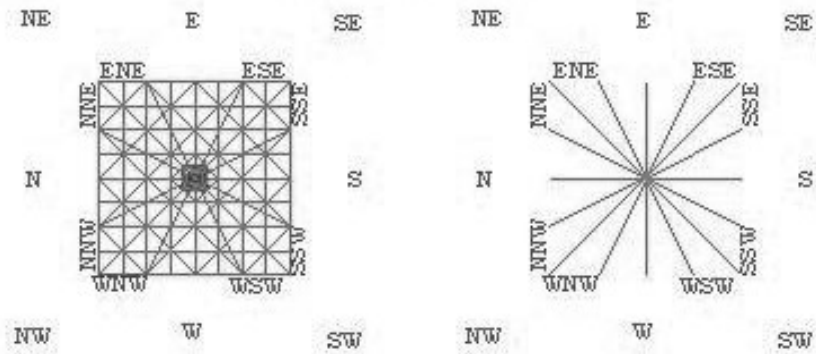
Hon. Mem. No. 423 R.A.; founder No. 449 R.A.

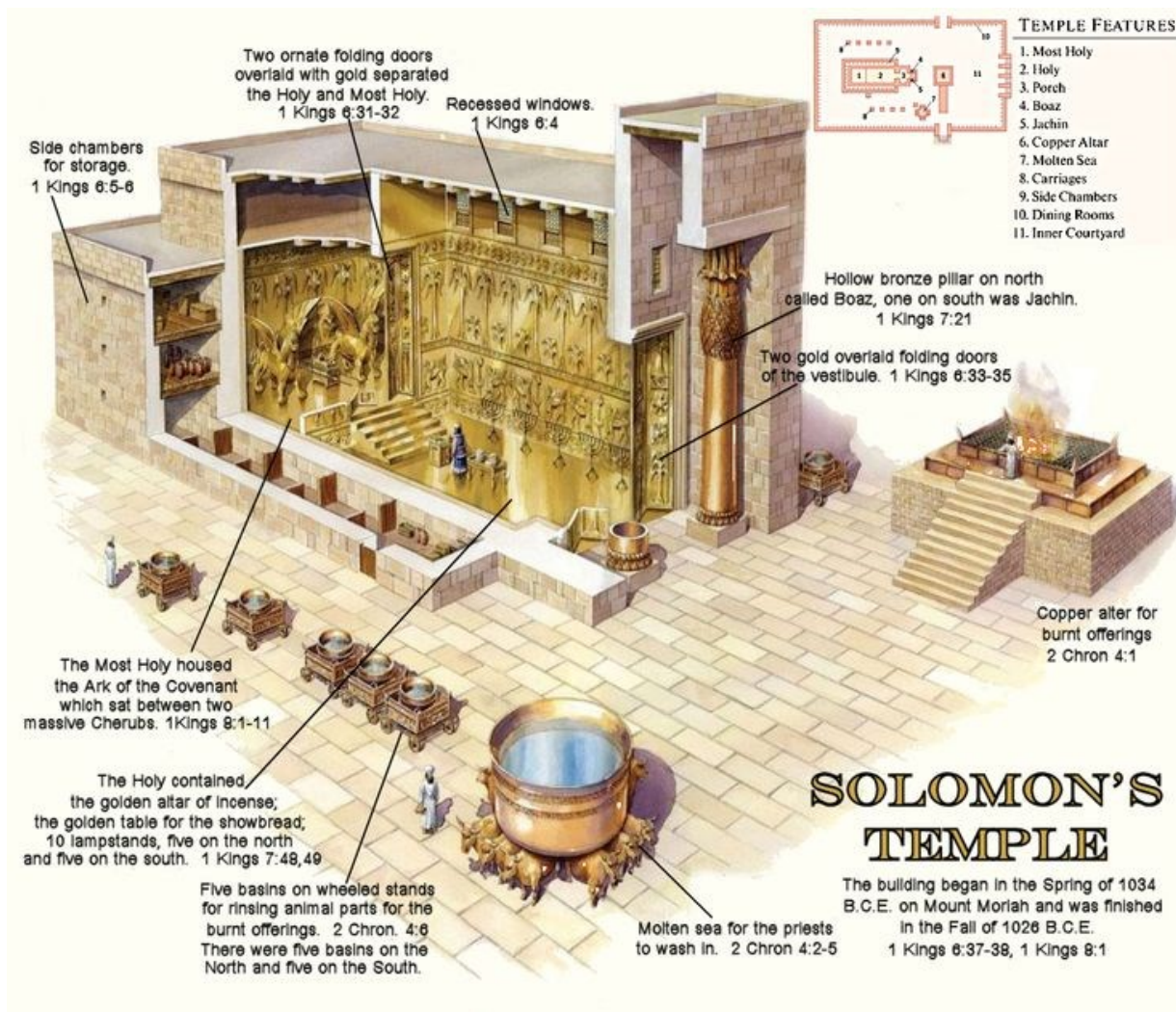


Edited by Bro. DB Jordan MPS - CDA20 2017

(Editing of this MS was in regards to changing outdated spelling and spacing between punctuation and words along with definitions where determined they were needed)

Sixteen Directions







Preface

As a humble student of the mysteries of our ancient fraternity I have often felt that the solemnity and significance of the N.E. Corner Charge are marred to some extent by the undue emphasis which is put upon one meaning of the word "Charity" to the practical exclusion of others. I find that other brethren have been similarly impressed. As a result of discussions on the matter I have prepared the following Lecture which I hope will be accepted as an attempt, at least, towards an exposition of the subject in its varied aspects.

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Dundee.



THE NORTH-EAST CORNER

I have heard it said by men who have travelled far in Freemasonry that no degree excels the first; and that of the First, the N.E. Corner charge is unequalled by any other portion of our finely-phrased ceremonial. The First Degree has all the charm of novelty and surprise. As a rule, the uninitiated knows nothing of our ritual, and is in a state of total darkness as to our order of service. He may have picked up little bits of information from a variety of more or less authentic sources, but these, most probably, have been intermixed with suggestions that the whole ceremony is a species of horseplay in which more or less good natured buffoonery has a conspicuous part. As a consequence, the candidate approaches the business in a kind of spirit of derring-do, fortified by the reflection that, as many of his friends and acquaintances have survived the ordeal, he may have similar luck. To a mind thus prepared, or, rather, unprepared, our ceremonial must come as a sort of spiritual revelation. The candidate finds himself at once in an atmosphere vastly different from anything: which he had anticipated. Serious purpose takes the place of clownish antics, and the spirit of the buffoon is completely forgotten in the lofty thoughts of men who invoke the blessing of God upon the work in which they are engaged. And surely, if the entrance of the candidate, the benefit of the lodge prayer, the solemn vow of fidelity, and the call to his noblest manhood to prove himself worthy of the badge of a mason, impress the postulant, he must be doubly impressed by the singularly beautiful charge which is addressed to him as he stands in the N.E. Corner, in the shoes of all the millions who have gone before him, figuratively, as each one of them in his turn had done, to represent the stone upon which the whole structure depends for its stability? By this time it must have been borne in on him that the Society of which he has become a member cherishes noble aims, exists to inculcate lofty thoughts, and, as he knows that the strength of a chain is the strength of its weakest link, so he must recognize that



Freemasonry expects every one of its members to represent a stone perfect in all its parts, and fitted to fill its place in the vast temple of universal brotherhood which every succeeding generation of Craftsmen strives to carry nearer to completion.

In popular parlance the exhortation delivered at the N.E. Corner is called 'the Charity charge,' and if one considers the older meaning — the New Testament meaning — of the word the term is singularly appropriate. For charity meant love towards our fellow men — the chief of the Christian graces — and love is the foundation on which every Mason must build if he would be faithful to the divine purpose of the Architect of our Mysteries. But, with the passing of the years, charity has lost its original meaning, and, in everyday speech, has come to connote merely monetary or other material relief or assistance. Thus to restrict its significance is to deprive the word of some of its grandeur, and I often think that the author of the finely-phrased charge which is delivered in all our lodges today took a narrow view of the matter, and in a somewhat unworthy way limited a spacious subject. He confines it wholly to' pecuniary assistance, emphasizing its highest note by contrasting rank and riches with the depths of poverty and distress; and this view is further impressed upon the mind of the initiate by the custom of thrusting a donation-box before him, and calling upon him to subscribe from an empty pocket. I think the practice is just a trifle theatrical, not altogether dignified, and, as the man's purse has been deliberately emptied beforehand, practically useless as an illustration of the need for being ever ready to help a poor and distressed brother. The conventional charge does less than justice to the genius of Masonry, and, as though conscious of this, some brethren seek to relieve its single purpose, and widen its scope, by the introduction of a passage from another source. "Benevolence," they say, "attended by heaven-born Charity is an honor to a nation whence it springs, is nourished, and cherished. Happy is he who has sown the seeds of Benevolence in his breast: he envieth not his neighbor;



he believeth not a tale when told by a slanderer. Malice and revenge having no place in his breast, he forgives the injuries of men.”

Elsewhere in our ceremonial there is evidence that the Charge is not intended wholly to refer to pecuniary assistance. In the final Exhortation of the Degree there is a reference to the ceremonies which are so amply illustrated in the N.E. Corner, namely Benevolence and Charity which clearly indicates, I think, that the matter is not to be circumscribed by mere money. Indeed, although we thus insist on expounding charity at all our meetings, it is our boast that we never dispense **charity**. In the common acceptance of the term, charity is something just a little if, indeed, any better than pauper-relief — the crumbs which fall from a rich man’s table to the dogs, the dole thrown to a beggar, the largess given by people of means ostensibly for the benefit of the poor, but really, as a rule, because their doing so gives them a certain satisfaction or gains them admission to the goodwill of the public. That is not the Masonic way if I apprehend Freemasonry aright. The Mason helps out of the kindness of a generous fraternal heart, never forgetting that the poor and distressed recipient is a brother with a well-founded claim to compassionate consideration. He does not parade his benevolence in the market place, but respecting a brother’s feelings, gives with a secret hand, praying that the world may never learn of what after all, is not the world’s business. All this indicates, I think, that charity, as it is generally understood, is alien to the spirit of Freemasonry, and that the Charity which is inculcated in the N.E. Corner is something wider, and deeper, and grander than casual dispensing of pecuniary help. If we take the other meaning of the word — “love towards our fellow-men” — we see the whole plan of Masonry revealed in a moment, and where, I suggest, could the plan be more fittingly unfolded than at the spot where the foundation-stone of all stately and superb edifices is laid? The Freemason is engaged in the erection of the most magnificent of all structures — the Temple of Character — and ere he is



equipped with tools, and invited to take a share in the work, it is well that he should know on what foundation he is expected to build.

An old and now forgotten book on Freemasonry lays it down that the three principal steps of tilt ladder that reaches from earth to heaven are Faith, Hope, and Charity of which Charity possesses the highest and most distinguished rank, and the reason for this will be evident, says the author, if we distinctly consider the exclusive properties of these virtues, and thence deduce the incomparable excellence of universal charity. Pursuing his plan he argues that Faith is a firm and sincere assent to the fundamental truths of religion, Hope is an earnest and well-assured expectation of escaping threatened dangers, and obtaining promised rewards, while "Charity in its greatest latitude, is an ardent love of God, united with an unfeigned affection for all His creatures. The love of God naturally inspires the love of our brother, created by the same Architect, formed of the same clay, springing from the same common parent, and cemented by the most indissoluble ties. The love of our brother is one of the principal conditions of our initiation into God's friendship, who is the Father and generous preserver of us all. Hence, if the vivifying beams of God's love be not shed abroad in the heart, there will exist little fraternal affection; but the common bond of Masonry and religion being violated, there can be no hopes of good, fruit proceeding from so impure a stock, and thus both are calumniated from the vicious conduct of some of their professors. Charity is not capable of a more restricted sense; for, if it be disunited from the love of God, and understood simply of brotherly love, it would be a virtue of inferior rank, and must yield precedence to both faith and hope. But consider Charity in its most extended signification as the pure and unfeigned love of God and man, and the doctrine of Masonry, corroborated by the argument of St Paul, will be fully understood and admitted." Faith, he concludes, is the base; Hope is the column, and Charity the ornamental capital which completes the fabric.



Long ago, Thomas a Kempis, in one of his many moments of inspiration, wrote, “ He is truly great who hath a great charity,” and it was probably with some thought such as that in his mind that Carlyle said, “Infinite is the help man can yield to man.” A great charity and a great field in which to exercise it! The one is what the Freemason is taught by every symbol of his faith to cherish; the other is the avenue by which he may prove his right to be called a brother.

I have said that “love towards our fellow-men” reveals the whole plan of Masonry, and that is why I think Charity may be regarded as the brightest gem in the Mason’s crown. It has been said that love is the food of the soul; Burton describes it as “that Homer’s golden chain which reacheth down from heaven to earth, by which every creature is annexed, and depends upon his Creator,” and if Burton had been a Mason he would probably have ornamented his metaphor with symbols of the Craft. Given the will to achieve its end, Freemasonry could become the greatest power in the world for good, banishing strife, and envy, and malice, and a hundred other things that hinder humanity in its progress towards perfection.

May not we take from all this that every Lodge should be a shrine at which the faithful Mason may burn tapers to friendship, kindness, good will, and all the other virtues that are comprehended in the phrase “ love towards our fellow-men?” Within the sanctuary of the Lodge a brother may find that peace which is denied to him in the outer world. This is finely expressed in a charge of one of the higher degrees. After exhorting the brother to faithful service, the Charge proceeds; “While such is your conduct, should misfortune assail you, should friends forsake you, should envy traduce your good name, and malice persecute you, yet may you have confidence that among Masons you will find friends who will administer relief in your distresses, and comfort in your afflictions.”



You remember what Burns says in one of his early poems? — **The heart benevolent and kind The most resembles God** — and Masons who work under the All Seeing Eye of the Great Architect of the Universe, ever striving by thought, and word, and deed, to approximate nearer and nearer to Divine goodness, must recognize the truth of the poet's words.

And in the end Charity is the only thing that counts. Love is the only coin that will be current at the last final reckoning when we shall be called to give an account of our stewardship. Wealth, position, earthly power — all will be as dust in the balance, and as the drop in the bucket. One of the grimmest legends I know is that of Charlemagne who made himself master practically of the whole world of his day. When he died he was buried at Aix-la-Chapelle (*Editor's note: Aix-la-Chapelle: is a spa and border city in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany*). His dead body arrayed in all the robes of Kingly grandeur was seated on the Imperial throne. On his knees was placed the Volume of the Sacred Law, and there he sat in all the awful majesty of death with his dead linger pointing to the line in the Gospel according to St Mark, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Brethren, it is possible for the faithful Mason to achieve that which Kings of the earth have failed to accomplish. Each of us may be a little center radiating the kindly influence of a sincere heart upon those around us, working often, if not, indeed, always, silently with never a thought of recognition, and finding all our satisfaction in the knowledge that we are striving to be faithful to the principles of our Craft. One of the outstanding monuments of our history is the Temple at Jerusalem. You recall how it rose on Mount Moriah in silence without the sound of metal tool. Are not these silent builders of the House of God symbolical of all the good work of the world? The builders of character are forever at work. They slumber not nor sleep. But ever their work is done silently. And as the timbers came from Lebanon, the stones from the quarries, and the vessels from Zeredatha (*Editors note: Zeredatha: The clay used for the casting the pillars of*



Boaz and Jachin had a peculiar characteristic, and is only found in the plains of Jordan between Succoth and Zeredatha, about 35 miles from Jerusalem. The pillars and sacred vessels of the Temple were cast there by Hiram Abif. The clay in this area is of unusual tenacity and is peculiarly fitted for making moulds; it is used to this day by the jewelers of Jerusalem in making moulds for casting small articles of brass and other similar purposes. It is said to be the best matrix-clay in Palestine. (1 Kings 7:46 - 2 Chr. 4:17) SO from a thousand sources come the materials out of which character is built. The good we do to others, the influence we exert upon those around us, the friendships we inspire, the wisdom we glean from experience — all these are gathered by the unseen hand to form the intangible but eternal structure that shall bear witness as to what manner of men we are.

The great principle of love towards our fellow-men which is inculcated at the N.E. Corner is emphasized in no unmistakable fashion in the Ancient Charges of Free and Accepted Masons which are appended to the Laws and Constitutions of the Grand Lodge of Scotland. These Charges, like Masonry itself, date from time immemorial and treat of the fundamental principles of the Order.

“Masons,” say the Charges, “unite with the virtuous of every persuasion in the firm and pleasing bond of fraternal love; they are taught to view the errors of mankind with compassion, and to strive, by the purity of their own conduct, to demonstrate the superior excellence of the faith they may profess. Thus Masonry is the center of union between good men and true, and the happy means of conciliating friendship amongst those who must otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance.”

All through the Charges this insistence on brotherly love persists. “Masonry has ever flourished in times of peace and been injured by war, bloodshed and confusion says the author, “so that kings and princes, in every age, have been much disposed to encourage the craftsmen on account of their peaceableness and loyalty.” Even when Masons have a difference, and when all means of friendly conciliation have failed, and they have to



proceed to law to settle it, they are enjoined to “ carry on their process, or law-suit, without wrath and rancor (not in the common way) , saying or doing nothing which may hinder brotherly love and good offices to be renewed and continued, that all may see the benign influence of Masonry, as all true Masons have done from the beginning of the world, and will do to the end of time.”

I cannot but think that if in thought we take our stand at the N.E. Corner from time to time and meditate upon the charge which is there delivered always, of course, with the wider meaning of Charity in our mind which I have sought to express, we shall get a grander conception of what Freemasonry is, and be inspired to carry out its great principles in all our dealings with mankind. And we should never forget that our duty is not only to those who are members of our brotherhood. He is a poor Craftsman who is kindly only to those who are conversant with the use and meaning of the Compasses and Square. Our pilgrimage is always towards light, and if we gather something of the light that is revealed to us we must reflect it upon all who come in contact with us. Thus will the world know that Masonry is a Heaven-born institution. There is a beautiful old legend of a hermit who forsook the garish show of the world to meditate upon God in the quietude of a cave on the East Coast of Scotland. In the immediate vicinity were jagged rocks that were dangerous to mariners, and many a frail barque (*Editors note: Barque: a sailing ship, typically with three masts, in which the foremast and mainmast are square-rigged and the mizzenmast is rigged fore-and-aft.*) went to destruction upon them. The good man was troubled by these disasters and at length hit upon the idea of a guiding light. Whenever, therefore, a storm broke upon the darkness, the hermit took his lantern and, pacing the rock-bound coast, waved it as he went as a warning to any sailor at sea. Down through the centuries the memory of his kindly deed has survived a beautiful testimony to a heart large with love of his fellow-men. The hermit may well be a symbol to the Freemason. Fife is often



likened to a sea in which the shoals and quicksand's and currents are poverty, distress, disease, and affliction. If, in times of peril to others, the Craftsman sheds the kindly light of a generous heart he will, in very truth, build upon the foundation-stone which is Charity, prove himself worthy of the name he bears, and, as Goldsmith has so beautifully said, "learn the luxury of doing good."

And it is with some thought such as that that I would leave the subject. **In Faith and Hope the world will disagree, but all mankind's concern is charity**, wrote Pope; and in a very special sense is it the concern of the Freemason. And let us be charitable in all things, slow to think evil, quick to be jealous of the good name of a brother, ready to render every kind office of mercy that occasion may require. Let us look with a kindly eye upon a brother's short-comings, and let us be ever charitable in judgment, and lenient in condemnation. It has been well said that there is nothing that is meritorious but virtue and friendship and, indeed, friendship itself is only a part of virtue. Like rivers, and the strand of seas, and the air, Friendship is common to all the world. Life should be fortified by many friendships; and where, one may reasonably ask, is the spirit more likely to be fostered than in the halls of Masonry? The wise king of Israel tells us in the "Proverbs " that "a friend loveth at all times, and is a brother born for adversity you remember that Shakespeare says — **The friends thou hast and their adoption tried, Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel.**

Pure friendship is something which men of an inferior intellect can never taste. It is a holy thing, not to be given lightly, and must rest on mutual goodwill and perfect trust. If we seek to instill something of this spirit into the apprentice as he stands at the N.E. Corner, we cannot fail to impress him with the majesty and inspiring grandeur of that which we call Freemasonry.