

CORN, WINE AND OIL

The wages which our ancient brethren received for their labors in the building of King Solomon's Temple are paid no more. In the lodge we use them as symbols, save in the dedication, constitution and consecration of a new lodge and in the laying of cornerstones, when once again the fruit of the land, the brew of the grape and the essence of the olive are poured to launch a new unit of brotherhood into the fellowship of lodges; or to begin a new structure dedicated to the public use.

Corn, wine and oil have been associated together from the earliest times. In Deuteronomy the "nation of fierce countenance" which is to destroy the people "shall not leave thee either corn, wine or oil."

In II Chronicles we read "the children of Israel brought in abundance the first fruits of corn, wine and oil -." Nehemiah tells of "a great chamber where aforetime they laid the meat offerings, the frankincense and the vessels, and the tithes of the corn, the new wine and the oil - " and later "then brought all Judah the tithe of the corn, the new wine and the oil into the treasures."

There are other references in the Great Light to these particular forms of taxes, money and tithes for religious purposes; wealth and refreshment. In ancient days the grapes in the vineyard and olives in the grove and the grain of the field were not only wealth but the measure of trade; so many skins of wine, so many cruses of oil, so many bushels of corn were to them as are dollars and cents today. Thus our ancient brethren received wages in corn, wine and oil as a practical matter; they were paid for their labors in the coin of the realm.

The oil pressed from the olive was as important to the Jews in Palestine as butter and other fats are among occidentals. Because it was so necessary, and hence so valuable, it became an important part of sacrificial rites. There is no point in the sacrifice which is only a form. To be effective it must offer before the Altar something of value; something the giving of which will testify to the love and veneration in which the sacrificer holds the Most High.

Oil was also used not only as a food but for lighting purposes; more within the house than in the open air, where torches were more effective. Oil was also an article of the bath; mixed with perfume it was used in the ceremonies of anointment, and in preparation for ceremonial appearances. The "Precious ointment upon the head, which ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, that went down to the skirts of his garment;" as the quotation has it in our entered Apprentice Degree, (and Nevada's Master Mason opening and closing) was doubtless made of olive oil, suitably mixed with such perfumes and spices as myrrh, cinnamon, galbanum and frankincense. Probably oil was also used as a surgical dressing; nomadic peoples, subject to injuries, could hardly avoid knowledge of the value of soothing oil.

With so many uses for oil, its production naturally was stimulated. Not only was the production of the olive grove a matter of wealth, but the nourishing and processing of the oil gave employment to many.

Oil was obtained from the olive both by pressing - probably by a stone wheel revolving in or on a larger stone, mill or mortar - and also by a gentle pounding. This hand process produced a finer quality of oil. "And thou shalt command the children of Israel that they bring pure olive oil beaten for the light, to cause the lamp to burn always." (Exodus, 27-20.)

The corn of the Bible is not the corn we know today.

In many, if not the majority of the uses of the word, a more understandable translation would be simply "grain." The principal grains of the Old Testament days were barley and wheat; corn represents not only both of these, but all the grains which the Jews cultivated. Our modern corn, cultivated and cross-bred was, of course, unknown to the ancients, although it might be going too far to say they had no grain similar to the Indian maize from which our great corn crop has grown.

An ear of grain has been an emblem of plenty since the mists of antiquity which shroud the beginnings of mythology. Ceres, goddess of abundance, survives today in our cereals. The Greeks call her Demeter, a corruption of Gemeter, our mother earth. She wore a garland of grain and carried ears of grain in her hand.

The Hebrew Shibboleth means both an ear of corn and a flood of water. Both are symbols of abundance, plenty and wealth. American Masonic use of a sheaf of wheat in place of an ear of wheat - or any other grain such as corn - seems rather without point or authority. As for the substitution occasionally heard, of "water ford" for "water fall," we can only blame the corrupting influence of time and the ignorance of those who have permitted it, since a water "Ford" signifies a paucity, the absence of water, while a water "Fall" carries out both the translation of the word and the meaning of the ear of corn - plenty.

Scarcely less important to our ancient brethren than their corn and oil, was the wine. Vineyards were highly esteemed both as wealth and as a comfort - the pleasant shade of the "vine and fig tree" was a part of ancient hospitality. Vineyards on mountain sides or hills were most carefully tended and protected against washing away by terraces and walls, as even today one may see the hillsides of the Rhine. Thorn hedges kept cattle from helping themselves to the grapes. The vineyardist frequently lived in a watch tower or hut on an elevation to keep sharp look-out that neither predatory man nor beast took his ripening wealth.

The feast of Booths, in the early fall, when the grapes were ripe, was a time of joy and happiness. "New Wine" - that is, the unfermented, just pressed-out juice of the grape - was drunk by all. Fermented wine was made by storing the juice of the grape in skins or bottles. Probably most of the early wine of Old Testament days was red, but later the white grape must have come into esteem - at least, it is the principal grape of production for that portion of the world today.

Corn, wine and oil form important and necessary parts of the ceremonies of the dedication, consecration and constitution of a new lodge.

Lodges were anciently dedicated to King Solomon, but as we all know, our modern lodges are dedicated to the Holy Sts. John. “and since their time there is represented in every regular and well-governed lodge a certain point within a circle, emborderd by two parallel perpendicular lines, representing those saints.”

This symbol of the point within the circle is far older than King Solomon’s Temple. The two lines which emborder it, and which we consider represent the Saints, were originally representative of the summer and winter solstices. The Holy Sts. John have their “days” so closely to the summer and winter solstices - (June 24 and December 27 are almost coincident to June 21 and December 21) that there can be little doubt that both lines and dates represented to our “ancient brethren” the highest and lowest points which the sun reached in its travels north and south. They are, most intimately connected with the time of fecundity and harvest, the festivals of the first fruits, the depths of winter and the beginning of the long climb of the sun up from the south towards the days of warmth which that climb promised.

Hence corn, wine and oil - the produce of the land - are natural accompaniments to the dedication of a lodge which it is hoped will prosper, reap in abundance of the first fruits of Masonic cultivation and a rich harvest of ripe character from the seeds it plants.

Corn, wine and oil poured upon the symbolic lodge at the ceremony which creates it, are essential to “erection” or “consecration.” All lodges are “erected to God and Consecrated to the services of the Most High.” From earliest times consecration has been accompanied by sacrifice, a free-will offering of something of real value to those who thus worship. Hence the sacrifice of corn, wine and oil - the wealth of the land, the strength of the tribe, the come-fort and well-being of the individual - at the consecration of any place of worship or service of God.

Like so much else in our ceremonies, the idea today is wholly symbolic. The Grand Master orders his Deputy (or whatever other officer is customary) to pour the Corn, the Senior Grand Warden to pour the Wine and the Junior Grand Warden to pour the oil upon the “lodge” - usually a covered structure representing the original Ark of the Covenant. The corn is poured as an emblem of nourishment; the wine as an emblem of refreshment and the oil as an emblem of joy and happiness.

The sacrifice we thus make is not actual, any more than Masonic work is physical labor. The ceremony should mean to those who take part in it, to those who form the new lodge, that the symbolic sacrifice will be made real by the donation of the necessary time, effort, thought and brotherly affection which will truly make the new lodge an effective instrument in the hands of the builders. When the Grand Master constitutes the new lodge, he brings it legally into existence. A man and a woman may be married in a civil ceremony of consecration. But as the joining of a man and woman in matrimony is by most considered as a sacrament, to be solemnized with the blessing of the Most High, so is the creation of a new lodge, but the consecration is also its spirit.

In the laying of a corner stone the Grand Master also pours, or causes to be poured, the corn, wine and oil, symbolizing health, prosperity and peace. The fruits of the land are poured upon the cornerstone to signify that it will form part of a building which shall grow, be used for purposes of proper refreshment, and become useful and valuable to men. The ceremonies differ in different Jurisdictions - indeed, so do those of the dedication, consecration and constitution of a lodge - but the essential idea is the same everywhere. regardless of the way in which they are applied in the ritualistic ceremonies.

It probably matters very little what varieties of grain, of oil and juice of the grape are used in these ceremonies. The symbolism will be the same, since the brethren assembled will not know the actual character of the fruits of the earth being used. The main theme is that "Fruits of the Earth" are being used, no matter which fruits they are! To be quite correct though, barley or wheat should be used for the corn, olive oil for the oil, and sacramental wine, such as is permitted by the Volstead Act (during the days of the prohibition!) for religious purposes for the wine. It may be noted, however, that "new wine" or unfermented grape juice was used by the children of Israel as a sacrificial wine, the ordinary grape juice in no way destroys the symbolism. Mineral oil, of course is oil, and is a "fruit of the earth" in the sense that it comes from the "clay which is constantly being employed for man's use." The oil of Biblical days, however, was wholly vegetable, whether it was the olive oil of commerce, or the oil of cedar as was used in burials.

Corn, wine and oil were the wages paid our ancient brethren. They were the "Master's Wages" of the days of King Solomon. Masons of this day receive no material wages for their labors; the work done in a lodge is paid for only in the coin of the heart. But those wages are no less real. They may sprout as does the grain, strengthen as does the wine, nourish as does the oil. How much we receive and what we do with our wages depends entirely on our Masonic work. A brother obtains from his lodge and from his Order only what he puts into it.

Our ancient brethren were paid for their physical labors. Whether their wages were paid for work performed upon the mountain and in the quarries, or whether they received corn, wine and oil because they labored in the fields or vineyards, it was true then, and it is true now, that only "in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." To receive the equivalent of corn, wine and oil, a brother must labor.

He must till the fields of his own heart or build the temple of his own "house not made with hands. "He must labor to his neighbor or carry stones for his brother's temple.

If he stands, waits, watches and wonders he will not be able to ascend into the Middle Chamber where our ancient brethren received their wages. If he works for the joy of working, does his part in his lodge work, takes his place among the laborers of Freemasonry, he will receive corn, wine and oil in measures pressed down and running over, and know a Fraternal Joy as substantial in fact as it is ethereal in quality; as real in his heart as it is intangible to the profane of the world.

For all of us then corn, then wine and then oil are symbols of sacrifice, of the fruits of labor, of wages earned. For all of us, "SO MOTE IT BE!"