

## WORKING TOOLS: TWENTY-FOUR INCH GAUGE AND COMMON GAVEL

As you have learned, Freemasonry is a philosophical society which traces its roots to the old operative Masons who actually built buildings. In the Middle Ages, there was very little formal education, particularly for the working man. The secrets of engineering and art so beautifully executed by the Masons in all of the great cathedrals of Europe were taught in the Masonic Lodges in which these Masons associated. The tools of these operative or building Masons, such as the square, level, plumb and gavel, were the most commonly used instruments in the erection of those magnificent edifices.

The medieval Operative Masons prided themselves on their work and accepted among them only those who were willing to learn the craft with the exactitude necessary to complete perfectly the buildings to which the Masons of the day were called to work. If one was a Mason, he was then known to be proficient in the technical art of construction and therefore could be hired by the local authority constructing the building with confidence that this person could adequately discharge any assignments received. These Operative Masons were also known for their honesty and fair dealing. They wished to maintain the reputation of their craft to assure any potential employer that honest work would be received for wages paid.

To assure honesty and fair dealing, we can infer from our history that philosophical lessons to inculcate those principles were taught the apprentices, who were learning to become Masons, through the symbolism of the Mason's tools. As the practical use of each tool was taught, the philosophical lesson symbolized by the tool may have been explained also. With the awakening of that intellectual curiosity that would lead to the Enlightenment, men who did not actually intend to build buildings with their hands sought admission to these operative lodges to speculate or study the philosophical teachings which could be discerned using the Operatives Masons building tools and techniques as symbols. Our lodges today evolved from these lodges in transition. We also use the working tools of the medieval, operative Masons as symbols, to reveal lessons of morality and ethics. With these working tools, today's Mason is taught to erect his intellectual, ethical and spiritual temple, as his operative predecessors with the same implements so constructed their material temples.

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The twenty-four inch gauge or two foot ruler would have been one of the first tools used in the quarry whence stone was harvested for use in a construction project. The gauge was used to help mark out lines on the stone in the quarry to be chiseled and thus freed from the bedrock. Once a block were thus released, the gauge was again used to measure the size of the stone as it was being chiseled with the common gavel to determine if it would remain of appropriate dimensions for the desired use in the construction project. Divided into twenty-four equal parts, the ruler became a symbol of the Mason's day, each inch of the measure symbolizing an hour. The youngest Entered Apprentice was thereby taught to devote eight hours of his day to the service of God and a worthy distressed brother, eight hours to his usual vocation as a stonemason's apprentice and eight hours to refreshment and sleep. The twenty-four inch gauge thus became a symbol of time well employed. With time well employed, we are always prepared to meet whatever challenge may come to us and optimize our accomplishments.

The common gavel was a working tool given to the more inexperienced apprentice in the lodge to break off the corners of the rough stone or ashlar, thus the better to fit it for use by the more sophisticated craftsmen who would further chisel the stone into a suitable cube, rectangular solid or other shape for installation in the building or other part of the project. The true form of the common gavel is that of the stonemason's hammer. It is to be made with a cutting edge, that it may be used to break off the corners of rough stones, an operation which could never be effected by the common hammer or mallet. It borrows its name from its shape, being that of a gable or gavel end of a house. Symbolically, the common gavel admonishes us of the duty of divesting our minds and consciences of all the vices and impurities of life. Just as the common gavel was used to divest the stone of its rough and superfluous parts, so should we use the common gavel symbolically to divest our hearts and minds of all the vices and superfluities of life, thereby fitting our minds as living stones in the superstructure which is human society.

These principles of right conduct are not limited to those who may be Masons. They teach principles by which all men and women should live. By the twenty-four inch gauge, we can understand that our lives should not be devoted solely to our own particular jobs and means of amusement. As the youngest Entered Apprentice was taught by the twenty-four inch gauge that a third of his day or eight hours should be devoted to the service of God and a distressed worthy brother, so should each one of us be motivated to devote some part of each one of our days to the promulgation of truth among those who may be ignorant of it and to the assistance of those who are less fortunate than we are.

By the common gavel, we should each learn that the human and unpolished mind, like a diamond surrounded with a dense crust, discovers neither its sparkle nor different powers, until the rough external is smoothed off, and its beauties, until

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then unknown, rise full to our view. Thus does education give what a common gavel does to the stone, not only an external polish and smoothness but the discovery of all the inward beauties latent under the roughest surfaces. By education, our minds are enlarged just as the youngest apprentice in the Masonic Lodge in the Middle Ages was introduced to education through the teachings of the lessons of his new craft. By education, we learn of things around us in our material world and, more importantly, learn with greater clarity that which is above all other knowledge: our real duty to God and Man.

As the medieval operative stonemasons used these instruments of their craft to erect the noble cathedrals of Europe, so should the lessons taught by those instruments be used by each of us to perfect ourselves and our relationships with others that, upon the strong foundation of faith, we may be fitted at last to inhabit that glorious house, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.