



Internet Lodge 9659
United Grand Lodge of England
Province of East Lancashire
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Short Papers Competition 2007

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Title
Author

The Broken Column
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Among the various articles of equipment of a Masonic Lodge there is, or there should be, a small wooden box surmounted by a rounded pillar with an irregularly finished top surface clearly indicating a break-off. This is known as the "Broken Column" and is used as a charity-collecting box.

Freemasons may often have wondered at the particular superstructure, which gives the box its name, and failed fully, to comprehend the symbolism of it's meaning.

It is, of course, commonplace that a column is a long, round pillar of wood, stone or metal composed of a base, a shaft and a capital, used perpendicularly to support, as well as adorn, a building, whose construction varies in the different orders of Architecture.

Among the Hebrews, columns, or pillars, were used, metaphorically, to signify princes or nobles, as if they were the pillars of a state. Thus, in Psalm XI, 3, the passage, reading in our translation, "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do"? is, in the original "when the columns are overthrown" i.e. when the firm supporters of what is right and good have perished. Similarly, the passage in Isaiah XIX, 10, should read, "Her (Egypt's) columns are broken down", that is, the nobles of her state.

In Freemasonry, columns have a symbolic signification as the supports of a Lodge; in some Constitutions of the Order they are known as the Columns of Wisdom, Strength and Beauty, symbolising King Solomon, Hiram, King of Tyre, and Hiram Abif, respectively. The Broken Column is emblematic of the fall of one of these three chief supporters of the Craft.

The use of a column or pillar as a monument erected over a tomb was a very ancient custom, and was a very significant symbol of the character and spirit of the person interred.

The Broken Column has been adopted in speculative Freemasonry to remind us, not only of those of our Brethren who have been called to the Grand Lodge above before the fullness of time, but more particularly of those Brethren who have become broken in health, fortune and spirit. It serves also as a reminder of the necessities of widows and orphans of departed Brethren, whose welfare it is our privilege, as well as duty, to safeguard to the utmost of our ability.

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