

THE THREE PILLARS

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A glance at any newspaper is enough to remind us that the world is full of misery, suffering and strife and that the future holds many threats and dangers. The 20th century was one of the darkest in all of human history as, while there were great triumphs of human reason and endeavour, these were matched by such unspeakable horrors as Auschwitz and Hiroshima. As a result of human selfishness and folly, the four Horsemen of the Apocalypse - war, famine, flood and plague could easily be unleashed at any time. Just one of these Horsemen could have devastating consequences as I well know, having spent the last thirty years in conflict with one of them; namely, plague, and especially the White Plague of tuberculosis. In this context, may I quote from the British Journal of Tuberculosis - The incidence of tuberculosis is an index by inversion of the real progress of the [human] race. By it the claim of civilisation to dominate human life may fairly be judged. Tuberculosis will decrease with the substantial advance of civilisation, and the disease will as surely increase as civilisation retrogrades.

Let me emphasise the last phrase, '... and the disease will as surely increase as civilisation retrogrades.' This was written in the year 1908, at a time when there was no cure for this terrible affliction, which was then the cause of one in seven adult deaths. Now, of course, we have a range of very powerful drugs against this disease, and health economists have calculated that use of these drugs is not only the most effective but the most cost-effective way of saving human life. The price of a pint of beer in a London pub could, if invested in tuberculosis control, purchase three years of healthy human life. Yet, overall, nothing has changed - this year there will be more cases of tuberculosis than in any previous year in human history - and, as in 1908, this disease will be the cause of one in seven adult deaths but, as we now have the cure, it will now also be the cause of one in four 'preventable' adult deaths. We live in the age of 'globalisation'. Communication has never been easier and swifter. The world has shrunk to a village, yet we seem unconcerned that, because of gross inequities, one and a half billion of our neighbours in this village live in abject poverty and are unable to access even the most basic health care. For millions of our brothers and sisters, easily treatable infectious diseases are death sentences and tuberculosis remains the Captain of all of these Men of Death, as it was termed by the evangelist John Bunyan. In the light of this terrible situation, the Head of the World Health Organization Tuberculosis Programme has stated 'The growing tuberculosis epidemic is no longer an emergency only for those who care about health, but for those who care about justice.' In this context, our original Grand Master, King Solomon, wrote 'Along the way of justice there is life.' But how are we to understand the issues of justice and global in relation to brotherly love as we in the Craft understand it. The best answer to this is to be found in the Sixth section of the First lecture - I will thank you to define brotherly love.

By the exercise of brotherly love, we are taught to regard the whole human species as one family, the high and low, the rich and poor, created by one Almighty Being, and sent into the world for the aid, support and protection of each other. On this principle Masonry unites men of every country, sect and opinion, and by its dictates conciliates true friendship among those who might otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance. Relief?

To relieve the distressed is a duty incumbent on all men, particularly Masons, who are linked together in one indissoluble chain of sincere affection; hence, to soothe the unhappy, sympathise in their misfortunes, compassionate their miseries, and restore peace to their troubled minds, is the grand aim we have in view; on this basis we establish our friendships and form our connections.

The example I gave, that of the global emergency of tuberculosis, is of course an extreme one: eventual eradication of this curable disease will only occur if there is a sea change in attitude leading to the creation of a caring global society and the ending of the present gross inequity that scandalises the human race. Yet the chance of such a caring society arising will crucially depend on the sum of the love and caring that individual people are prepared to give to each other. The principles of brotherly love that we are taught in the Craft were, contrary to what our critics would have the world believe, never intended to be extended only to our fellow Masons. Indeed, the Address to the Worshipful Master on his Installation instructs him to charge his brethren to practice out of the Lodge those duties they have been taught in it so that when anyone is said to be a member of it 'the world may know that he is one to whom the burdened heart may pour forth its sorrow, to whom the distressed may prefer their suit, whose hand is guided by justice, and whose heart is expanded by benevolence.'

Again, we encounter the word justice, and closely related to justice is peace. Peace is no abstraction - certainly it is far more than the mere absence of conflict - it is the sum of personal relations and mutual understanding, trusting and acceptance. In the city of Kuala Lumpur there is a Buddhist temple from which one can see the minaret of a mosque, the tower of a church and the spires of a Hindu temple. On the wall of the Buddhist temple is depicted the lotus symbol surrounded by the words 'Patience, Tolerance, Understanding'. For true brotherly love and peace to flourish, the human race will have to come together in a spirit of patience, tolerance, understanding. One of the most loved and respected spiritual leaders on the continent of Europe, Brother Roger of Taizé, re, recently wrote 'It is so clear that each of us is faced with the most audacious adventure of reconciliation.' He tells of the time that he met some Muslims in a slum in Bangladesh and one of them said to him 'All human beings have the same Master. This is a secret that has not yet been revealed. But later on people will find out.' But this secret is revealed in our Craft - we acknowledge that, behind and beyond the manifold forms of religion, there is but one Great Architect of the Universe. In this context, the German theologian, Hans Küng, has written 'Peace between people requires peace between religions', and it is perhaps in this human dimension that Freemasonry has a particular role to play in forwarding world peace. But here we encounter a

paradox - we are charged in the First degree to abstain from every topic or religious discussion and yet the Divine Light shines through our whole system. The Address to the Brethren in the Installation ceremony reminds us that the principles and tenets of our profession are founded on the principles of religious truth and virtue. Can we as Masons therefore address the profound questions concerning the meaning of life, the universe and everything and, thereby, come to plumb the depths of brotherly love and indeed the source of Love itself, without trespassing on the territory of religion? I believe we can. One of the most awe-inspiring buildings in the city of Istanbul is Justinian's sixth century church called Hagia Sophia which means Divine or Holy Wisdom. Sophia was the ancient Greek goddess of Wisdom but in time the word was applied to Wisdom itself - the word Philosophy is derived from the Greek Philos-Sophia - the love of wisdom. Not, please note, the quest or pursuit of wisdom but the LOVE of wisdom. We encounter the Hagia Sophia or Divine Wisdom early in our ceremony of Initiation - in the prayer of that Degree - Endue him with a competency of Thy DIVINE WISDOM, that, assisted by the secrets of our Masonic art, he may the better be enabled to unfold the beauties of true godliness to the honour and glory of Thy Holy Name.' All the major world religions put great stress on the divine origin and nature of wisdom. In the Orient, wisdom is often portrayed as the feminine consort of the masculine creative deity. In Judaism, we have the wisdom writings attributed to Solomon and in the Book of Proverbs (8:30) we read of Wisdom, in words that will strike a chord with all Master Masons:

I was by his side, a Master Craftsman

Delighting him day by day

Ever at play in his presence.

In Freemasonry, we expound on wisdom by means of appropriate architectural symbolism. Perhaps one of the most inspiring parts of our whole system - but one sadly not often worked in our Lodges - is to be found in the Explanation of the First Degree Tracing Board Our Lodges are supported by three great pillars. They are called Wisdom, Strength and Beauty: Wisdom to contrive, Strength to support, and Beauty to adorn; Wisdom to conduct us in all our undertakings, Strength to support us under all our difficulties, and Beauty to adorn the inward man. The Universe is the Temple of the Deity we serve; Wisdom, Strength and Beauty are about His throne as pillars of His works, for His Wisdom is infinite, His Strength omnipotent, and Beauty shines through the whole of creation as symmetry and order.

Thus the first great pillar that supports our Lodges and, by implication, the whole Masonic system is Wisdom. But what is source of Wisdom and how can we reach this source? In his recent encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*, Pope John Paul II has written that '.... God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth - in a word, to know himself - so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves. John Paul then stresses that throughout the centuries of human history, in both the East and the West, humanity has struggled to answer fundamental questions such as 'Who am I? Where has the universe, including that fragment that I call 'I', come from? Where are we going? Why is there evil? What is there after this life?' In the context of these questions, John Paul reminds his readers of the admonition carved on the portal of the temple at Delphi - Know Thyself Let me again quote from *Fides et Ratio* '... by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves.' Can we put this the other way round? Can we, by knowing ourselves, come to know God? The great Indian mystic, Swami Vivekananda who did so much to foster understanding between Christianity and Hinduism - and who was a Freemason - remarked that 'Just as certain world religions say that people who do not believe in a personal God outside themselves are atheists, I say that a person who does not believe in himself is an atheist. Not believing in the splendour of one's own soul is what I call atheism.' Yet, is it not insufferable arrogance for us to regard our own souls as being splendid? Are we not all only too well aware of our weaknesses and failures? If we were self-made, we would indeed be guilty of arrogance but, fortunately for us, we are not self-made - we are the work of the Great Architect. And, because God is Love, the way to know God, our neighbour and ourselves is through love. My favourite verses in the Volume of the Sacred Law are from the first letter of St. John, Chapter 4: 'Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God. Everyone who loves is a child of God and knows God, but the unloving know nothing of God. For God is Love ...' later in the same chapter, John adds 'God is Love; he who dwells in love is dwelling in God, and God in him. This is for us the perfection of love, to have confidence on the day of judgement, and this we can have, because even in this world we are as he is.' It is thus through treading the path of love that we may, as we are charged in the First Degree, '... raise a superstructure perfect in its parts and honourable to the builder.'

St. Jerome recorded that when St. John was a very old man his simple message was 'Just love one another, that is all you need.' This simple message was echoed many centuries later by the English mystic Julian of Norwich who had a series of remarkable revelation of the Love of God, which she recorded in her truly remarkable book *Revelations of Divine Love* - the first book written in the English language by a woman. One of the most profound chapters in Julian's book is the final one in which she describes how she meditated upon the meaning of her visions for fifteen years or more before she had a further vision in which it was revealed that Love is God's entire meaning. She wrote - I desired frequently to know what our Lord's meaning was. And fifteen years after, and more, I was answered in spiritual understanding, saying thus; 'Wouldst thou know thy Lord's meaning in this thing? Be well aware:

Love was his meaning. Who showed it thee? Love. What showed he thee? love. Why did he show it thee? For love. Keep thyself in that love and thou shalt know and see more of the same, but thou shalt never see nor know any other thing therein without end.'

Julian also stressed the importance of acquiring self-knowledge as the door to divine wisdom. She wrote 'This passing life that we lead here, in our sensuality, is not aware of what our true self is, except in faith. When we come to know and see clearly what our self is, then shall we, truly and clearly, see and know our Lord God in fullness of joy.' Beyond the

pillars shown on the First Degree Tracing Board is a ladder extending to Light. On the rungs of this ladder are figures or symbols depicting the principal moral virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity. The Explanation of this Tracing Board points out that the Mason who is possessed of the last of these, Charity or Love, in its most ample sense may justly be deemed to have attained the summit of his profession. Thus, at our initiation, we set out on a journey of Faith, led on by Hope and with Love as our final destination. Our entry in a state of darkness symbolises that first existential leap of faith and trust, that philosophers such as Kierkegaard speak of, but once we have made that leap into the unknown the darkness is replaced by the light of Divine guidance.

The brotherly love that we learn in the Craft must, of course, be universal. Within our Lodges, however, brotherly love is manifested by our friendship, respect and trust, as well as by the care we extend to those members stricken by sickness and tragedy. But, in addition, the very special and unique Masonic work that we do should be seen as a labour of love. I am sure that you will all agree that the manner in which your Initiation, Passing and Raising were conducted profoundly affected your perception of the Craft and your subsequent enthusiasm for it. It is an enduring privilege to have passed through ceremonies performed to a high standard and with sensitivity and it is a labour of love for the Master and his officers to grant this privilege to new brethren, as well as to those well skilled in the noble art who are never beyond learning something new. It is quite depressing when officers do their work poorly or without feeling and sensitivity. It is even more discouraging when they simply fail to turn up to ceremonies and expect others to deputise for them, sometimes with little notice or even no notice at all. We all realise that modern-day life is tough and stressful for many but I well recall the reply of a clergyman to those who said they were too busy to come to church 'If you are too busy to devote an hour each week to the worship of your Creator, and to the sustenance of your immortal soul, then you are far busier than you have any business to be.' Our second great pillar is Strength. Through history, Strength has been the ally of Wisdom. It is a sad but regrettable aspect of human history that, whenever there has been a quantum leap forward in thought, there has always been a dark current in the opposite direction. Socrates, whose great contribution to philosophy was to encourage his students to question everything, was sentenced to death, allegedly for corrupting the minds of the young, but countless others have suffered and died in the name of freedom of thought over the ensuing millennia. We see good examples in that period of European history called the Renaissance, which means a re-birth. This was a time of great change and advancement in the natural sciences, theology and art but these advances were bought at a great price. Galileo and Luther came under very great danger and only just escaped with their lives. Copernicus only escaped persecution because he died on the day his discoveries on the structure of the solar system were published. Giordano Bruno was less fortunate. In the light of Copernicus' model of the solar system, he suggested that other stars might have planetary systems and that some other planets might thus support intelligent life; but for this not unreasonable postulate, he was burned at the stake in Rome exactly 400 years ago. My favourite Renaissance figure is the Swiss physician and chemist, Paracelsus, whose real name was Theoprastus Bombastus von Hohenheim. He was a forceful and blustering character - indeed the word 'bombastic' is derived from his middle name - and he was forever struggling against the resort to ancient 'received wisdom' rather than to observation and experiment. Eventually, in desperation, he threw the University of Basle's most treasured book, Avicenna's Canon, on to a bonfire on the Celebration of the Feast of St. John the Baptist in the year 1527. Not unexpectedly, that ended his career at the university and he became a wanderer, but his brave and defiant act marked the end of the long ages of magic and alchemy and the beginning of the modern era of medical and chemical research. I mention Paracelsus in particular as I wonder whether, had it not been for the inner strength and determination of the Renaissance men, another very significant milestone in the freeing of human thought from the tyranny of fear would have occurred 190 years, to the very day, after Paracelsus' defiant act. I refer to the foundation of the first Grand Lodge of Freemasonry on the Feast of St. John the Baptist, 1717. But history repeats itself, and even today free thinking is so often held back by dogmatism and axe grinding. One of the reasons is the phenomenal success, and massive impact in all walks of life, of the experimental sciences. This in turn has led to the dogma, even the modern-day religion, of 'scientism' which may be defined as 'an approach to knowledge that regards the scientific understanding of a phenomenon as the only relevant issue, whilst ignoring any other factors.'

Fortunately, not all great minds have fallen into the mire of scientism. The philosopher Wittgenstein asserted that 'we feel that even when all scientific questions have been answered, the questions of life remain unanswered' and an anonymous commentator wrote, 'The catastrophic and progressive sundering of questions of science from questions of spirituality and religion in the 17th and 18th centuries has left the West exposed not only to the scurrilous recrudescence of superstitious mania and manipulation, but to the even more damaging phenomenon of a fragmentation of reality.' We are certainly witnessing a fragmentation of reality in our present so-called 'post-modern' world in which truth itself is relative - what may be true for you may not be true for me. A characteristic of this post-modern relativism is the crumbling of the firm foundations of so many structures of society. A typical, and much publicised, post-modernist remark is 'there is no such thing as society, only people.' The result, as one commentator has expressed it, is 'a dreadful vacuity and despair in our midst.'

Is it the result of this fragmentation of society, in which a third of people do not know their neighbours, in which the 'I' is more important than the 'We' and in which the desire to render oneself more extensively servicable to others is not high on the agenda of many. Against the relativism and shifting shallowness of this post-modern era, Masonry has so much to offer. As the Charge After Initiation stresses '... no institution can boast a more solid foundation than that on which Freemasonry rests' The grand principles on which our Order is founded are brotherly love, relief and truth. And the truth spoken of here is as absolute as it was on that remarkable day, the Feast of St. John the Baptist, 1717, when the first Grand Lodge was founded and that equally remarkable day exactly 190 years previously when Paracelsus took a major step forward in the liberation of human reason from the chains of imperialism and dogma.

But we as Masons need the strength to resist the current relativistic trends and there are good signs that we are doing so. Those of you who have attended the Quarterly Communications of Grand Lodge in recent months will, surely, have sensed the new atmosphere of determination to boldly defend ourselves against all attacks based on deviations from the truth. And perhaps we are doing this, and developing our greatly welcomed new spirit of openness, at just the right time. Precisely because it has brought about a dreadful vacuity and despair in society, post-modernism has sown the seeds of its own destruction and one commentator has stated that we are at the dawn of an era in which we will stop pretending that spirituality is an epiphenomenon and he cites the moral bankruptcy of materialism, the increasing observer-awareness in physics and the increasingly spiritual awareness in art, literature, music and philosophy. Deepak Chopra has written that 'We are in the midst of the climacteric overthrow of the superstition of materialism.' Some, of a more romantic and poetic nature, hail the dawn of the new Age of Aquarius. Here, let us now turn to our third great pillar - Beauty. How does this pillar relate to the other two, and how does it relate to the very source of Love itself? Beauty is intimately intertwined with Wisdom and Strength and with both the symmetry and order of creation and love, as is well expressed in the Apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon - Against Wisdom evil does not prevail.

She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other and she orders all things well.

I loved her and sought her from my youth,

and I desired to take her for my bride

and I became enamoured of her beauty.

Perhaps no human being has ever developed a clearer concept of the true nature of beauty than Plato, who lived between 428 and 348 BC. One of the most remarkable periods in all of human history spanned the sixth and fifth centuries BC as this was a time when enormous spiritual growth and maturation occurred simultaneously in many parts of the world. Within Judaism, the period of the Babylonian exile and the subsequent rebuilding of the Temple at Jerusalem around 445 BC was the time of the Prophets and the formulation of the Talmudic Law, while in the East it was the time of Confucius, the Buddha and of the authors of the Hindu Upanishads. It was also the beginning of that rich period of Hellenistic thought which ultimately led to the philosophy of Socrates and his disciple Plato. Many regard Plato as the greatest philosopher of all time - indeed, though possibly an exaggeration, it has been stated that all other philosophical writings are merely footnotes to Plato.

Plato initially had aspirations to become a politician but abandoned these ambitions when he discovered how thoroughly corrupt the politicians of that day were. He therefore decided to study philosophy under Socrates and his already low opinion of politicians took a further dive when his teacher was sentenced to death. The philosophy of Plato eludes definition in precise terms. He presented his thoughts in a unique style; that is, as a series of dialogues in which various historical figures, notably Socrates, as well as a number of imaginary characters, with quite different personalities and manners of speech, indulge in debate and argument over a wide range of ethical, philosophical and political issues. This peculiar style of presentation obliges the reader to look at all sides of the argument and, eventually, to draw his or her own conclusions. There are twenty seven surviving dialogues (as well as a few fragments of others) and the best known are Republic and Laws, which describe Plato's concepts of ideal societies, Phaedo on immortality, Symposium on love and Timaeus on mathematics, cosmology and medicine. Plato's dialogues cover a wide range of topics but there is a dominant and recurrent theme which is now what we generally mean when we speak of Platonism. According to this philosophy, all the things that we see and experience in this created universe are imperfect and transient reflections of perfect, eternal and abstract celestial forms, referred to as universals or archetypes. One of these is the archetype of beauty. In the third century of the Christian era, Plato's philosophy took on a much greater spiritual dimension and resurfaced as Neo-Platonism, principally as the result of the teachings of Plotinus - an Egyptian who opened a school of philosophy in Rome in 244 AD. Neo-Platonism was a serious challenge to Christianity which had been legalised by Constantine and, subsequently, dogmatised and institutionalised by the Church Councils. Constantine's nephew, Julian, who became Emperor in 361, espoused Neo-Platonism but, owing to his untimely death in battle two years later, he failed to establish it in the place of Christianity as the 'official' faith of the Roman Empire. Nevertheless Neo-Platonism persisted until its suppression in the 6th century AD and it had an enormous influence on the theology of Christianity in those early formative centuries. Indeed, Saint Augustine of Hippo converted to the Christian Faith as a result of his study of Neo-Platonism. Thus, it was not uncommon for Jesus the man to be regarded as the earthly embodiment of the eternal and archetypal 'Cosmic Christ', the dynamic and creative aspect of the Deity. This concept is, in fact, elegantly expressed in the opening verse of the Gospel of John: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'

Let us return to the prayer in the ceremony of Initiation -

Endue him with a competency of Thy Divine Wisdom, that, assisted by the secrets of our Masonic ART, he may the better be enabled to unfold the BEAUTIES of true godliness to the honour and glory of Thy Holy Name. The words art and beauty are stressed here and this leads us to an aspect of Platonism that is clearly central to Freemasonry; namely, the sense of archetypal beauty which underpins our whole system. As the Explanation of the First Tracing Board reminds us 'Beauty shines through the whole of creation as symmetry and order.' In his book 'Art and the Beauty of God', the Bishop of Oxford, Richard Harries, explores the Platonic concept that our sense of beauty is a reflection of our sense of the transcendental reality of God, and he relates this idea to the concept of archetypal forms. The Bishop quotes from Plato's dialogue Symposium which describes the revelation of a beauty whose nature is marvellous indeed. This beauty is first of all eternal; it neither comes into being nor passes away; it is absolute, existing alone

with itself, unique, eternal, and all other beautiful things as partaking of it, yet in such a manner that, while they come into being and pass away, it neither undergoes any increase or diminution or suffers any change.

But what can the mystery of beauty tell us about our nature and our relation to the Great Architect? Can it point to a particular place for Masonic symbolism in our inner spiritual life? Many mystics and philosophers, including the Christian mystic Origen, have reiterated the Platonic view that our sense of beauty is due to the fact that we are really eternal spiritual beings whose true home is Heaven but that this reality is concealed from us by a veil or cloud of unknowing. In his essay *The Weight of Glory*, C.S. Lewis states his belief that our love of beauty is really a haunting desire for 'our own far off country.' He adds that this 'inconsolable, and sometimes painful, secret is within us all and that it is one that we can neither express nor hide. It makes us feel awkward even when we admit it to ourselves. It is, perhaps, worth quoting C.S. Lewis at length on this point:

In speaking of this desire for our own far-off country, which we find in ourselves even now, I feel a certain shyness. I am almost committing an indecency. I am trying to rip open the inconsolable secret in each one of you - the secret that hurts so much that you take your revenge on it by calling it names such as Nostalgia, and Romanticism and Adolescence; the secret which also pierces with such sweetness that when, in very intimate conversation, the mention of it becomes imminent, we grow awkward and affect to laugh at ourselves; the secret we cannot hide and cannot tell, though we desire to do both. We cannot tell it because it is a desire for something that has never actually happened in our experience. We cannot hide it because our experience is constantly suggesting it, and we betray ourselves like lovers at the mention of a name.' Lewis emphasises that we do not merely long to see beauty - we long to be totally caught up in it. He states that we are summoned to pass in through the beauties of Nature into a splendour which Nature only fitfully reflects. He adds that we experience beauty and joy a thousand removes from their Source and asks 'What would it be to taste at the fountain-head that stream of which even these lower reaches prove so intoxicating?' In this context, may I read you part of a poem from a book entitled 'What I am is Stillness' by William Anderson and Clive Hicks which so elegantly portrays the ache for 'our own far off country', as C.S. Lewis termed it:

Constantly we are offered the Kingdom
And we lose it in the wars of the soul.

Even in childhood it seemed

There was somewhere more wonderful we had known,

When the voices called us at sunset

And the tall cliffs glowed red,

When the voices cried 'Come home, come home',

And we stood on the sand, not knowing

Which home, the house up on the hill

Or the place known only from the ache

Aroused by the horizon,

The ship's funnels,

Or the cloud suspended and waiting.

Is this mere poetry and romanticism, divorced from the harsh realities of the world? Certainly C.S. Lewis argues with his characteristic lucidity that 'our longing to be reunited with something in the universe from which we now feel cut off ... is no neurotic fancy, but the truest index of our real situation.' The truth of this assertion is not determined by the experimental sciences or by human reason but by the experience of the poets and mystics.

I would therefore like to conclude my address by relating a personal experience in which the utter transcendence of the Great Architect, brotherly love, peace and sheer beauty all met together. I was working at Surabaya in the East Java province of Indonesia. My wife and I were staying with a university professor and he asked me if I would give advice to two of his Ph.D students, a Chinese married couple. I willingly agreed and subsequently got very friendly with them and one evening we were invited to the home of their uncle, one of the leading Buddhists in East Java. Ten years previously he had founded a temple, optimistically to house 500 worshippers but he now had a congregation of 10,000! We gladly accepted his invitation to visit the temple, which was set on a low hill. It was daylight when we entered but it is a characteristic of the equatorial regions that the darkness comes in very quickly once the sun has set. Thus, when we came out of the temple, the sky was jet black but was studded with numerous bright stars and the Milky Way was like a huge diamond-spangled pathway across the sky. If that was not beauty and grandeur enough, in the centre of the sky was the crescent of the New Moon facing downwards, and the Evening Star was just above it, almost as if it was suspended over a chalice and illuminating it. I was so awe-struck by the loveliness of the scene, accentuated by the warmth of the tropical evening and the wonderful scent of the jasmine and other flowering shrubs, that I couldn't resist saying aloud 'The Heavens declare the Creator's Glory'. At that point in time, our host said nothing and we walked down the hill to the car park.

When, however, we reached the car, our host remarked 'If everyone in the world could experience what we have just experienced, there would be world peace. The trouble with the world is that there are so many people with God-shaped

holes in their hearts.' We then drove back to the city and when we came to take our leave, he gave us his prayers of blessing with laying on of hands, completely unselfconsciously, right in the midst of a busy thoroughfare.

I need add no comment - the story speaks for itself - save to say that no words can ever capture the beauty and the sheer transcendence of that evening - a transcendence that for countless brethren constantly finds expression in our Masonic Art.