

THE DOOLITTLE PICTURES

The pictures which illustrate the emblems of the three degrees - either on a chart hung on the wall, supported on an easel, or by means of lantern slides and a projector - are practically universal in American Freemasonry. The curious uniformity and the unquestioned poor art of the vast majority of these illustrations bear testimony to the universality of Masonic thought in the forty-nine Grand Jurisdictions of the nation. For practically all of them are either copies of the originals of Amos Doolittle, Connecticut engraver, or adaptations from them.

In 1819 Jeremy L. Cross, famous New Hampshire Mason, Masonic lecturer and instructor, produced his "True Masonic Chart". This curious old book, which has had some sixteen or eighteen editions, was illustrated by the Nutmeg State brother. It was the first of the illustrated "Monitors" which, in one form or another, persist to this day in a majority of Grand Jurisdictions.

The Fraternity has fared better at the hands of her poets and her singers than by the pencils of her artists. Burns and Kipling are names to conjure with in any list of poets Mozart was no mean musician; more modern makers of music have given the Craft some beautiful harmonies. As yet no artist worthy the name has offered the brethren illustrations of real merit. Had Doolittle been as great an artist as he was a worker; had his skill with engraving tools been equalled by his knowledge of drawing, "Master's Carpets", Lodge room charts, lantern slides, might carry a much more inspiring and beautiful message to candidates.

The Grand Lodge of Connecticut, justly proud of her famous sons who have been prominent Masonically, has several examples of Doolittle's art in the form of aprons and diplomas. His contemporary engravings of non-Masonic character are well known to collectors, especially his four illustrations of the fighting at Lexington and Concord. But the originals of his Masonic pictures, the actual plates of the illustrations to Cross's "True Masonic Chart" have not been located.

From M.W. Winthrop Buck, least Grand Master and Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Connecticut comes the following information:

"Amos Doolittle was an important member of the Fraternity in Connecticut. He is said to have been received in Hiram Lodge No. 1 July 20, 1792. His card states that he was born in 1754 and died in 1832, was Master of Hiram Lodge in 1802, had a Revolutionary War record, was a Tavern keeper, member of the Commandery in 1821 and a Charter Member of the Second Company of the Governor's Foot Guard. About the time he became Master, Hiram Lodge began to meet in his Tavern and continued there for ten or twelve years. About the same time the Grand Lodge made an agreement in which, for the loan of \$100, Brother Doolittle was to furnish a room, light and heat as long as the Grand Lodge wished to be accommodated. This agreement was terminated in 1826. The Grand Lodge has the original document showing the agreement between the Grand Lodge and Brother Doolittle."

The Dictionary of American Biography states:

DOOLITTLE, AMOS (May 18, 1754Jan. 30, 1832), engraver, was born in Cheshire, Conn., the son of Ambrose and Martha (Munson) Doolittle, being next to the eldest in a family of thirteen. From a craftsman in his native town he began to learn the trade of silversmith, but for some reason turned his attention to engraving on copper. In this he seems to have been his own instructor.

While still a young man he left Cheshire, and made his home in New Haven, where he lived the rest of his life. He was one of a number of citizens who memorialized the General Assembly "to construct them a district military company by the name of the Governor's Second Company of Guards," and thus he became a charter member of that famous organization which is known today as the Governor's Foot Guards. When, in the spring of 1775, news came of the battle of Lexington, Doolittle was one of those who under Capt. Benedict Arnold marched to Cambridge. Their services, however, were not needed there at the moment, and they soon returned to New Haven.

Doolittle was a practical patriot, and made the expedition serve him to good purpose, for in December of the same year he was advertising in the Connecticut Journal four copper plates depicting "the battle of Lexington, Concord," etc., from paintings made by Ralph Earle. As representations of what actually took place they can hardly be regarded as of much value. It has been said of them that they are "not to be held amenable to any canons of art, except those formulated and adopted by the artist of his own sweet will".

He was an indefatigable worker, turning out from his little shop on the college square a great variety of plates. He seems not to have depended entirely upon the burin for his livelihood, for advertisements in the local papers inform us that he dealt in varnishing, enameling, etc., and that he made silver and metal eagles, and one of his own prints tells us that he had a rolling press.

His work as an engraver shows a wide variety of subjects. He furnished numerous portraits and illustrations for books, engraved music, money, and diplomas, and made a number of bookplates. He is said to have assisted Abel Buell in engraving the latter's wall map of the territories of the United States according to the Peace of 1783, and he engraved the two maps included in Jedidiah Morse's Geography Made Easy (1784).

One of Doolittle's principal works, which has received high commendation (Charles Henry Hart, Catalogue of the Engraved Portraits of Washington, Grolier Club Publications No. 42, 1904), is his "Display of the United States of America," in which Washington is the central figure surrounded by the coats of arms of the states. There are several variations of this plate. It was followed by a "New Display," in which John Adams was the central figure, and yet again by another "New Display," which carried the portrait of Jefferson.

Doolittle was twice married. Regarding his first wife information is lacking, save that her first name was Sally, and that she died Jan. 29, 1797, in her thirty-eighth year (Connecticut Journal, Feb. 1, 1797). His second wife was Phebe Tuttle, whom he married on Nov. 8, 1797, and who died in 1825. He died in New Haven and was buried in Grove Street Cemetery.

A contemporary newspaper carried the following incident in Doolittle's life; it is reproduced here through the courtesy of the Grand Secretary of Connecticut:

Invasion of New Haven by the British occurred July 5, 1779. The British entered New Haven on the old Derby road, through Hotchkisstown, (now Westville). A small body of men under Capt. Phineas Bradley, with two small cannon, made a stand to oppose their entrance on the top of the hill, the east of the Bridge (formerly called Thompson's Bridge) but, their ammunition failing, they were obliged to retreat. The embankments thrown up on this occasion were quite recently visible. The enemy then continued their course towards New Haven, and when at the west end of Chapel street, placed a large field piece, and fired it off down the street.

Our informant, Mr. Amos Doolittle, who was one of the party who resisted the enemy at Hotchkisstown, states that when obliged to leave there, his wife being sick, he returned to his house, which was near the College and after throwing his gun and equipments under the bed, awaited the coming of the enemy with anxiety.

As soon as they arrived he front of his house, an English lady, who resided with him, stepped to the door, and addressing one of the officers, requested a guard for the house. The officer asked her, with an oath, who she was; she informed him that she was an English woman, and then had a son in his majesty's services; upon which the officer, addressing a Highlander, ordered him to guard the house, and not to allow the least injury to be done to its inmates.

It was owing to the address of this lady that Mr. D. was not carried to New York by the enemy; for some of the soldiers, entering the house by the back door, and discovering the gun under the bed, inquired the purpose of it. The lady with great presence of mind, answered that the law obliged every man to have a gun in his house, adding, that the owner of it was as great a friend to King George as themselves. A store near his house, having been broken open by the soldiers, one of them advised Mr. D. to go and provide himself with whatever he wanted adding that he was perfectly welcome; but, not wishing to take advantage of his neighbor's distress, the offer was, of course, declined.

With such a background and activities, the wonder is not that Doolittle's Masonic drawings were such poor art, but that they possessed sufficient vitality, spite of bad drawing and lack of inspiration, to live to such a venerable age.

Open a copy of the True Masonic Chart; the first illustration is a "Master's Carpet" practically identical with hundreds to be seen today on the walls of country Lodges. Here are the two pillars, the All Seeing Eye above, the letter G, a pair of compasses inclosing a pentalpha. Scattered liberally over the whole are anchor, ark, Jacob's ladder, beehive, rough and perfect ashlar, hour glass, point in circle, sword and heart, forty seventh problem, working tools, urn, book of constitutions guarded by the sword. The pillars stand on a mosaic pavement on which is also an altar and three lighted candles, while below the three steps which lead to the pavement are mattock, spade, coffin and sprig of acacia.

In the immediately following pages the emblems are arranged by degrees. More numerous, more detailed, fine of line, they testify to Doolittle's skill with his tools, however much they cry aloud at his lack as an artist. In these faded and yellowed pages are to be found the answer to that question so often asked - "why do we illustrate our truths so crudely?" Here are, for instance, the brethren meeting on the top of a hill, and in a vale. They wear hats - apparently stove pipe hats! Two cowans

and evesdroppers are being warned away in each picture. It is true the hill is but a knoll, and the vale but a pit in the ground - doubtless the artist felt that some license must be permitted him who was expected to put so vast a scene on such a small canvass.

Jacob's Ladder raises three rounds (carefully lettered F. H. and C !) to high heaven. Heaven is represented by a circular patch of storm clouds, surrounding seven large five pointed stars. A stream, a forest, an individual tree, complete the masterpiece!

On much the same landscape begin the winding stairs, at the top of which is the Middle Chamber. It has neither sides or roof, but a figure in the door satisfies the beholder that it is of human proportions and not, for instance, a dog house. Two pages further on blazes the letter G (carefully suspended from a cord !) in an arched section of Lodge room the like of which has never been built.

But it is on the pages devoted to the Master Mason Degree that Doolittle outdoes himself. Three enormous columns support each its proper original Grand Master; tiny doll like figures with all the dignity of marionettes. The pot of incense burns with such fury that it might be a representation of a Bessemer converter in full action. Seven bees flutter industriously about a beehive apparently made of rope. A comet flies straight at the sun, here drawn with the details of a benignant human face, apparently unfrightened at the menace, while the inevitable seven stars, a crescent moon and limpid All Seeing Eye complete the page.

Finally, there is the Beautiful Virgin, the Broken Column, Time, the Book, the Urn. Pages have been written about it; learned pundits have discussed it; controversies have raged over it. Did Jeremy Cross invent it? Did Amos Doolittle suggest it? There is evidence both ways, preponderantly in favor of the fact that neither introduced the idea of the monument into Freemasonry, although some credit one or the other, or both, with the broken column. But of the merits of this matter this Bulletin is not concerned. Regardless of who originally conceived the idea that a monument to the historic dead should necessarily be a part of the Master's degree, there is no question that the monument, Time with his scythe, counting the virgin's hairs, the urn, the open book, the broken column, were all combined by Doolittle into a drawing the very grotesqueness of which apparently gave it the vitality of the life of the Wandering Jew! It has wandered to every State in the Union; anywhere, everywhere, when this emblem is reached in the ceremony, the candidates is shown a picture of a mannikin with a beard, muscular legs, a venerable head, playing with the hair of a lady whose virginity none would doubt, while managing also a scythe of truly awe inspiring dimensions. The drawing is vigorous, flat, formal, awkward. None may miss its meaning, as tire artist inscribed on the open pages "amiable, distinguished, exemplary" to point his moral and adorn his tale!

It is perhaps ungentle to make even gentle fun of a brother who worked in all seriousness, whose labors have lived through more than a century, who gave form if not substance to ideas not previously seen of Masons except in print. It is only by aid of humor that those who think the emblems and the truths of the Sublime Degree worthy of the highest and best which art might offer, can tolerate Doolittle's uninspired drawings. Even as any grammarian or rhetorician could "improve" the ritual by the elimination of awkward syntax, so could almost any art student vastly improve the modern children of these old pictures.

Craftsmen who love the ritual as it is because it is old and therefore sacred would keep it as it is. Those who wish for finer delineation of the emblems would fight to the death to keep the ancient Doolittle pictures, perhaps because of, rather than in spite of, their imperfections !

Of such veneration are Masons made - so may they ever be !