



# Provincial Grand Lodge of Forfarshire

## Peter Taylor's Talks

Talk number 23

First delivered by me at Lodge Albert Lochee 448 on the 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2008

### AN INTERPRETATION OF THE TEXT OF THE 12<sup>TH</sup> CHAPTER OF ECCLESIASTES

***1 Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.***

***2 While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain:***

***3 In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened,***

*The keepers of the house* are the shoulders, arms and hands; *shall tremble*-the means of averting danger, because of old age, shall become paralytic.

*The grinders shall cease because they are few.* The teeth which grind the food, as the millstone grinds the corn, shall become loose and fall out.

*Those that look out of the windows be darkened.* The windows are the two eyes; they shall lose their faculty of sight. Obscurity of vision is an invariable accompaniment of extreme old age.

***4 And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low;***

*The doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low.* The doors are the lips; the streets are the mouth, because it is the way by which the food passes into the stomach, and the sound of the grinding is the *noise of the voice*. The meaning of the expression is, that the teeth being gone, the old man no longer chews, but noiselessly mumbles his food, and closes his lips in the act, to prevent the particles from falling out. This is the usual mode of mastication in the very aged.

*And he shall rise up at the voice of the bird.* The voice of the bird is the crowing of the cock.

*And all the daughters of music shall be brought low.* The daughters of music are the two ears. The voice becomes tremulous and feeble, and the hearing becomes obtuse. "the daughters of music" is a Hebraism for the voice and ear, the organs used in the production or enjoyment of musical sounds, just as the arrow is called "the daughter of the bow" by Isaiah.

***5 Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets:***

*They shall be afraid of that which is high.* Those heights which in the days of their youth they would have ascended with ease and alacrity, the aged now look upon with hesitation and fear.

*And fears shall be in the way.* They are filled with the apprehension of imaginary dangers, which they have neither the sight to avoid nor the strength to overcome.



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***The almond tree shall flourish.*** The hair shall become grey. The flowers of the almond tree are white, and hence when the tree is flourishing and full of them, it is compared to the head of aged man.

***The grasshopper shall be a burden.*** To the imbecility of old age, the lightest thing, even a grasshopper, becomes an oppressive burden.

***And desire shall fail.*** The appetites and desires of nature cease with the departure of youth.

***Man goeth to his long home.*** Literally "to the house of his age," the grave, which is the last house and shelter of the material body.

***The mourners go about the streets.*** This refers to the Eastern custom of employing official mourners, who made public lamentation in the streets for the dead. This passage is also explained as alluding to the rattles in the throat, the mouth and throat being considered as the street or road of the food, and the rattles being called the mourners because they are sure precursors of death.

***6 Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.***

***The silver cord be loosed.*** The silver cord by some is said to be the string of the tongue; by others the spinal marrow, because of its silvery whiteness. The loosening of the silver cord is the cessation of all the nervous sensibility.

***The golden bowl be broken.*** The brain is called the golden bowl, from its yellow colour. Death approaching, it is rendered unfit to perform its functions.

***The pitcher be broken at the fountain.*** The pitcher means the *vena cava* or great vein, which carries the blood to the right ventricle of the heart, here called the fountain.

***The wheel broken at the cistern.*** By the wheel is meant the aorta or great artery, which, receiving its blood from the left ventricle of the heart or *cistern*, distributes it throughout the body. These two last expressions, the breaking of the pitcher and the wheel, allude to the stoppage of the circulation of the blood, the last step in the decay, which is immediately followed by death.

***7 Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.***

And then, in the concluding words of the Chaplain.... "***Shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it***"

Commentators generally concur in the foregoing exposition of that beautiful allegory, the incorporation of which into the Masonic ritual is one among numerous evidences that the institution does and always has inculcated the dogmas of resurrection and immortality. Such of our readers who have not heretofore read the exposition of this affection, yet elegant and spirited description of old age and death, will now readily perceive how peculiarly appropriate is such an introduction to the sublime and awful ceremonies of that degree in which death, the resurrection and life eternal are the topics, and of which the spade, the coffin and the sprig of acacia are the symbols.