

# *THE MARK MASTER*

## Foreword

It appears that in the ritual familiar to the author the principal officer is titled Right Worshipful Master and represents King Solomon. The degree is set in a time after the death of Hiram Abif and King Solomon has no knowledge of the use or a need for the keystone. In the ritual of the USGC of NSW & ACT the Principal Officer is titled Worshipful Master and represents Hiram Abif, who is well aware of the need for the stone. Other differences will be noted by the reader.

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THE opening ceremony of the Mark Master degree is reminiscent of the opening ceremonies of those degrees which precede it and stresses its relationship thereto. The minimum number necessary to compose a Lodge of Mark Master Masons has symbolic significance apart from its "rational explanation" which accounts for the number as being the minimum number of officers required to properly confer the degree. Eight will make a double square, symbol of the material. It will also form an oblong whose length is twice its width. The significance of this fact is apparent when the "form of a Lodge" is recalled, as described in a previous degree. The number "eight" is recognized as the first cube (that of two). The Kabalists claimed the number "eight" symbolized perfection. It signifies friendship, prudence and justice and is likewise a symbol of primeval law which REGARDS ALL MEN AS EQUAL.

If "eight" had no other significance, the last mentioned would be ample justification for its prominence in a degree whose exoteric teaching so forcefully presents the thesis of the equality of all men. However, this is but the exoteric teaching and an analysis of all the properties of the number "eight" will convey an esoteric reason for its inclusion in the Mark Master Degree; this will be apparent when the symbolic meaning of "squares" is discussed.

The stations and duties of the three principal officers as recited in the opening have the same symbolic meaning as in the "Blue" Lodge, and are therefore necessarily of astrological implication. Broadly defined these duties are the enlightenment of the Craft, as the duty of the Great Luminary is to give material light to the universe.

It has been claimed by some Masonic authorities that the Mark Master degree, at least in part, was at some far off time included in the work of the Fellowcraft degree. The setting itself would lend colour to this argument but aside from the setting there is more subtle evidence at hand.

When actual work in the degree is approached the statement is made that the Lodge is opened "for the purpose of ADVANCING Brother Blank— etc.—" In the York Chapter "Brother Blank" of necessity is a Master Mason, having been raised in a legally constituted and duly opened Lodge of Master Masons. On reflection it is realized that it is NO ADVANCEMENT for a Master Mason to be

made a Mark Master. In fact of knowledge he is beyond the lessons conveyed in this degree, and most certainly it is no SYMBOLICAL ADVANCEMENT, for it takes one who has presumably learned the symbolic meaning of acute angles back to "Right angles, Horizontals and Perpendiculars" which is a symbolic retrogression. For a Fellowcraft, however it is an advancement both from an ethical and symbolic viewpoint, from where he is left at the close of the Second degree as now conferred in our "Blue" Lodges. There is still other evidence in favour of this theory.

The candidate, when asked a certain question, answers: "Try me," as does the Fellowcraft in answer to the same question. Like the Fellowcraft he stipulates that he be tried by the "tools of his profession." The Mark Master receives "wages" as does the Fellowcraft with a subtle distinction. The Mark Master is paid in coin, the Fellowcraft in "Corn, Wine, and Oil."

"Corn, Wine and Oil are the Masonic elements of consecration", states Mackey, in his Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry, and he further explains: "The adoption of these symbols is supported by the highest antiquity".

Corn, Wine, and Oil were the most important productions of Eastern Countries; they constituted the wealth of the people, and were esteemed as the support of life and the means of refreshment. David enumerates them as among the great blessings that we enjoy, and speaks of them as "wine that maketh glad the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart." Psalms 104; 15.

In that beautiful twenty-third Psalm, reference is again made to the corn, or nourishment, oil and wine: "Thou preparest a table before me in the midst of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over". To state that these three symbols denote "Plenty", "Health", and "Peace" is the crassest kind of material explanation. In fact it might be considered misleading, were we not accustomed to the Masonic fact that "within the Lodge" the Great Truths are not revealed, and that we must seek elsewhere for such light as is not therein revealed.

The ancients who worshipped the sun as a god, or as a symbol of God, considered all things the yellow, golden colour of the sun as pertaining to it; hence gold, brass and corn or grain, because of their golden colour were deemed sacred. Corn was one of their principal foods it was, to the devout, actually nourishment from God, a reward for obedience to His laws.

In Oriental Philosophy Francis Grant refers to the ancient symbolical significance of wine thus: "God was at once the wine of life and the Wine Bearer". Of the great Sufi poet, Omar Khayyam, he says: "But few westerners have ever glimmered that Omar's wine was not the wine of men, but the ecstatic inflow of a religious mystic experience". While the time of which Grant writes is a much later date than here discussed, the Sufi poets but borrowed their symbology from the earlier times with which we are concerned.

In the ancient ceremony of crowning a king, his head was anointed with oil by the officiating priest. This oil was contained in a flask fashioned from the horn

of a bull or a ram, and carried in the priest's girdle. The Jew, of course, considered the one anointed as ordained by Jehovah; the Pagan Priest ordained in the name of Taurus or Aries, depending on the horn from which the oil was poured.

Here then is the true wage of the Fellowcraft: the corn which nourishes the physical body, provided by the all-wise beneficence of his Creator, truly a gift from God. Oil, the refresher of his physical body, that "which makes his face to shine". Again, for Biblical authority, "It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard; that went down to the skirts of his garment for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore". Here again is encountered that Masonic system of "double meaning" so often present. The Scripture just quoted is used in the Entered Apprentice degree. It first mentions "how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity". To the casual observer it is this pleasant association which is "like the precious ointment" and so it is in the First degree. However, the second and far more important meaning is that "LIFE FOR EVERMORE" is the objective. More mystically interpreted it is this "anointment", this ceremony of pouring the "oil" upon the head which sets the individual apart from others, which makes him, anointed of God and as such ordained for that "LIFE FOR EVERMORE". Finally he is given "wine" as a part of his "Wage". That "wine" which as Grant explains is "not the wine of men, but the ecstatic inflow of a religious mystic experience "THE SUMMATION OF HIS LABOURS".

Having "passed to the degree of Fellowcraft" previously, the Mark Master has had this experience of being paid "wages" of "Corn, Wine, and Oil". Now being ADVANCED he is paid in COIN, which he can exchange for sustenance OF HIS OWN CHOOSING. The inference is obvious; being now more ADVANCED he is expected to have that finer sense of discrimination which accompanies "advanced knowledge" and instead of being provided for by his superiors (symbolic of an all-wise providence) without freedom of choice, he is paid with a medium of exchange which allows him latitude in the selection of the fruits of his labours.

According to Waite, Time Immemorial Lodge, otherwise known as Lodge of Hope No.302, under the Grand Lodge of All England at York, was conferring the Mark Master degree in 1724 and it was evidently practiced under an old constitution derived from the Grand Lodge of York. He states it is "thought to have been worked prior to the closing of the second degree". In the face of all the evidence, both historical and symbolical there can be little doubt that these two degrees, set in the same locale, originally were parts of one and the same degree, or at least worked together with the Mark Master being a continuation of the Fellowcraft degree. Their very teaching adds weight to the theory, for the Fellowcraft degree is psychical, devoted to the inculcation of learning. The Mark Master degree instructs HOW to apply that learning, thereby making the best use thereof. The distinction of the "Blue" Lodge may well be made—the Fellowcraft "SPECULATES"—the Mark Master "OPERATES".

Some Chapters, feeling the need for a modulation into the actual work of this degree to soften the harshness of the introduction of the candidate to Capitular Masonry, preface it with what they term a "pro-Logue". This is in the nature of a playlet, acted out for the benefit of the candidate. It depicts the workmen in the quarries and shows the "young Fellow-craft" as finding a beautiful stone already prepared which he is tempted to present as his own work. There can be no objection to such a "prologue" as long as it is distinctly kept and understood to be such. The difficulty with attempts to so explain and preface any ancient degree of Freemasonry is in the fact that usage might at some future time ADD some of the "prologue" to the actual work of the degree. One of the difficulties the modern student of Freemasonry now encounters in his studies is these additions made in the past. They sometimes distort the ancient symbology and if the attempt is made to detach them, one is confronted with the surgical problem of judging "exactly how much to cut away".

The first section of the actual work in this degree is, in itself, in the nature of a "prologue" to the initiatory part of the degree, although in a sense IT IS "initiation". From some viewpoints the Mark Master degree, particularly this first section, contains contradictions and is even incongruous with the Masonic method of teaching as elsewhere encountered. It is not in accordance with the usual Masonic custom to introduce the candidate in the manner in which he is first brought into the Lodge room.

That something is lacking is plainly evident. Obviously, we do not have the ritual of the Mark Master degree in its ancient form. There is evidence of omissions as well as modern additions. These latter being as apparent as would be the work of a mediocre sculptor who attempted to fashion arms for the Venus DeMilo. However, it is not our present problem to attempt to discover WHAT these changes may be, but rather to explain the hidden meaning of such of the symbolism as remains to us.

The concept of placing the candidate in the position of being an impostor and a cheat is not in keeping with Masonic philosophy as we have encountered it thus far in our journey through Masonic initiation. If the candidate is astute enough to catch the significance of the phrase, "you are not entitled to wages", he may disrupt the entire initiation by later refusing to attempt to gain that to which he is not entitled. No alternative is possible in the ritual by which such a contingency can be met. Good Masonic practice would seem to call for an alternative whereby his honesty is commended and the desired lesson still obtained from the incident. Undoubtedly, originally, some different treatment was in use but if so it has been corrupted by time and all trace is lost to us now.

There is, however, one bright light shining through the gloom of this feeling of frustration. "OWING TO ITS SINGULAR FORM AND BEAUTY", the first two who viewed it were loath to discard the Keystone. Here is recognition of the beauty of the spiritual even by those who supposedly are ignorant of its value. Passing only on "square work" symbol of the material, with a material viewpoint which is incapable of judging anything but the material useableness of the work they inspect, yet they are impressed with the pure beauty of this emblem of

spirituality and intuitively hesitate to discard it. True, it is finally discarded; else the allegory could not be carried to its logical completion and the final lesson driven home. Here is the startling revelation that the most beautiful thing of life is but fit to be heaved over in the rubbish, by him who has not reached a level where he can recognize its inherent value and put it to its intended use.

The next event furnishes the time element of this degree. Logic places it after the death of our Ancient Grand Master, as the Temple was still under construction and not completed. It was quite apparent AFTER the death of the Architect, for the Keystone was his personal work or fashioned under his personal direction. Had the incident occurred before his death, we should have no allegory, for its value would have been recognized and it would not have been discarded.

On first thought one might be inclined to criticize the degree from the viewpoint that the Right Worshipful Master impersonates King Solomon who could be expected to recognize the symbol of the spiritual which the young craftsman presented. On further contemplation the criticism gives way to admiration of the consistency of the ritual. The actual wording, when carefully studied, indicates that the Right Worshipful Master is not aware of the nature of the work in question. The candidate is merely accused of "attempting to draw wages" not his due, and further of presenting work which would not pass inspection. Thus it is clear that the one man who might be expected to know the worth of the Keystone did not see it. There is also a fine point in favour of the candidate; "as the sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth". He claims no merit for his work, he but presents it in silence. He argues not about his wages, he but attempts to draw them as he is instructed to do.

When interrogated he claims to be a Fellowcraft and proves his contention in the prescribed manner to the satisfaction of all concerned. The penalty for his presumed infraction is conditionally remitted and he is sent back to the quarries, "there to labour until such time as he can present work which will pass inspection".

Here is an exposition of the great law of karma and reincarnation. "Ignorance" sends the young Fellowcraft back to labour, to do over that which he has not properly done before. Karma sends the individual back to the quarries of rebirth to learn those lessons he failed to learn on previous occasions when the opportunity offered. Again and again and yet again man returns to his labours until he can finally present such work as will pass the inspection of the Great Overseer and entitle him to "wages". Universal Law is the same, be it in the ancient stone quarries of Masonic allegory or on the spiritual plane, the work must be done over and over again until perfect and then the reward is certain.

In the second section the candidate is back on familiar ground. The need of a pass, the questions and answers all have a familiar ring. If he counts the number of rounds in his perambulation he discovers they indicate the expected progression. The "approach" likewise is "numerically" logical and the position he is told to assume is one which is familiar to him. The obligation renews ties

under which he is already bound with the exception of those certain portions pertaining specifically to the Mark Master degree. Here is no mystery nor hidden meaning. It is what is plainly on the surface. The use of the cable-tow is the same symbology as in the Symbolic degrees. Its length is "one more turn" it is an "additional tie" to the fraternity and he is released because he is "now, bound by a stronger tie". Likewise the grip is explained "rationally" and there is no deeper meaning apparent. It is logically accounted for in the ritual.

A lapse of time is indicated between the retiring of the candidate after the ceremony of obligation and his re-entry into the Lodge room. The second part of section two finds the "Temple nearly completed" and "the craft at a stand for the want of a Keystone". Here too, is a rather glaring inconsistency. If the reply of the Right Worshipful Master to the Senior Warden is carefully noted it will be observed that the station of the Junior Warden should be "vacant" in this portion of the Mark degree for the same obvious reason it is vacant in the Most Excellent Master degree.

Symbolically, it is here for the first time that the Fellowcraft, the worker on the psychical plane, is introduced to the spiritual. True to universal law his introduction is through his dire need. Man may be ignorant of the very existence of a thing until his need and his lack make him cognizant of it. The shape of the empty space informs him more clearly than any drawing on the trestle-board the exact form of the missing stone. Thus simultaneously the NEED and the VALUE of the capstone is brought to his realization. Once knowing what to seek, the stone which was heaved over into the rubbish as "neither oblong nor square" is remembered it is recovered and set in place: "What is this then that is written, the stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner?"

HE THAT HATH AN EAR TO HEAR LET HIM HEAR." The Mark Master who so desires may place a Christian interpretation on this passage, but the Mark Master who is not a Christian is not thereby prevented from participation in this degree for there is a broader interpretation possible which transcends all mere creeds.

This symbology demonstrates a deeper truth. The True Word is NEVER LOST. "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart". The "word" has always been present but man has failed to recognize it. It is not lost, it is outside his cognition and as each individual reaches that level in his evolution where the "word" (stone) is essential to further progress, to the building of HIS TEMPLE, he discovers it through the imperative need and its obvious fitness to the circumstances of life in which he finds himself. Just as the vacant space in the arch foreshadows the Keystone, so the need of the spiritual in man's life directs the way to that which alone can complete the structure.

The lecture of this degree is unique among so-called Masonic lectures. It is the only one given in this particular form. There is no proficiency examination used at this time in the Mark Master degree but there is, logical grounds to suggest that at one time in the past an examination was used. The degree was originally worked in the Symbolic Lodge where the candidate was caused to pass an examination in other degrees. There is no reason to believe that an

exception was made for the Mark Master Mason. Further "proficiency" in the Mark Master degree is demanded before the degree of Most Excellent Master can be conferred upon the candidate. The lecture itself appears as a combination of lecture and examination and doubtless is, in its present form, the remains of what originally represented a separate lecture and examination of the candidate.

Much is brought to light in this lecture which would otherwise remain obscure if left to the action of the degree. In part it is a description of the working of universal law. Though the "rational explanation" recites the legendary, "material" reasons are given for the founding of the degree. Actually it teaches of the law of compensation in the universe; that each individual inexorably receives his just due; that no one in the end can profit by taking that which he has not earned and that he cannot hope to be rewarded for work not properly done.

In the explanation of the "common gavel" of the Entered Apprentice it is said: are taught to make use of it for the more noble and glorious purpose of divesting our hearts and consciences of all the vices and superfluities of life, thereby fitting our minds as living stones, for that spiritual building, that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

The "heart" has long been associated in the mind of man with the emotions, "conscience" as the arbiter of his ethics. But neither of these is to be fitted as "living stones in that spiritual building"—IT IS THE MIND which is being fitted, for without the guidance of the intellect the emotions betray us and the conscience cannot discriminate.

Again in this degree the lesson is repeated note carefully in the explanation of the symbology of the "chisel" it is the MIND which is likened to the "rough ashlar". Truly are the degrees of Fellowcraft and Mark Master the psychical degrees of Freemasonry.

"The mind, like the rough ashlar, when taken from the quarry, is rude and unpolished, but as the effects of the chisel in the hands of the skilful workman soon outlines and perfects the carved capital, the stately shaft, and the beautiful statue, so education discovers the latent virtues of the mind and draws them forth to range the large field of matter and space, to display the summit of human knowledge, our duty to God and Man".

Were Freemasonry of no other value, were it but a secret society and fraternal organization, if there were no secret doctrine, no Divine inspiration behind the veil of allegory, in fact if there were no veil of allegory, it still would serve a great and useful purpose and be entitled to perpetuation, so long as it taught man to seek knowledge. For without knowledge man is no better than the beast of the field.

The "mallet" continues to teach the lessons of the tools of the Fellowcraft. As the "level" teaches that we are all "travelling upon the LEVEL of time," so the "Mallet corrects irregularities and reduces man to a proper LEVEL. "As the "plumb admonishes us to walk uprightly in our several stations before God and

Man, squaring our actions by the SQUARE of virtue," so does the "mallet" admonish us to "curb ambition, depress envy and moderate anger". True these are material and psychical lessons, not spiritual, but we have learned that man is a triune being composed of ALL THREE and unless these first two planes of his being are served there can be no spiritual progress that which serves an UNDIVIDED PART of a whole, serves the whole.

The "charge" of this degree as might be expected deals largely with the material and appeals to the intellect. However, ethics cannot be discussed without approaching the borders of the spiritual and in some passages of this charge the implications are apparent. As example: "Your duties, which become more and more extensive as you advance in Masonry". This is but another way of informing that "ours is a progressive science". The only REAL progress the individual can make is in the acquisition of knowledge. As the "knowing" expands, so does his responsibility become the greater to live a life in keeping with the higher level he has attained.

The lecture closes with the assurance "that the stone which the builders rejected (possessing merits to them unknown) became the chief stone of the corner". Because we, in our ignorance, do not recognize the merits of the spiritual it does not detract from that value. It but keeps us from benefiting there from. But as we progress, when we "place ourselves in that proper position," we eventually learn to also place the spiritual upon the topmost part of the Arch for it then becomes the only reality to them who have discovered it.

The payment of wages is another lesson in the working of universal law. It teaches that no matter how early or late the discovery is made of spiritual values, all receive the SAME REWARD. It cannot be otherwise, there are no "degrees" of perfection. "Perfect" is the superlative, there is no comparative. A thing is either "perfect" or it is not "perfect". Likewise with the workmen in the parable they either worked or they did not work. The "householder" was not interested in the number of hours they laboured but in the fact that they did their assigned tasks.

Some Chapter members, inclined to be critical, remark on the incongruity of introducing a quotation from the New Testament in a ritual depicting events which occurred hundreds of years before that period. If the attempt of this degree were merely to be historically correct the criticism might well be made. The object of this degree is not to teach history but to bring to the candidate a far greater lesson. That being the case the beauty and value of the lesson are ample excuse for the incongruity. In any event, Jesus taught the Old Philosophy, he said nothing new but merely tried to explain the ancient teaching. Thus in spite of historical inconsistency the desired results are obtained if the candidate takes to his "heart and conscience" the great truths which the degree so forcefully presents.