

# HUMILIATION IN THE DEGREE OF MARK MASTER MASON

## FOREWORD

This paper has been adapted to conform to the ritual approved by the USGC of NSW & ACT from a paper by O Cummins.

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In some ways every Masonic Degree is different and we tend to think of them separately and without reference to the other degrees. Yet the ceremonies by which they are conferred exhibit a strong family resemblance. In each one the candidate is prepared by being clothed in a peculiar fashion specified in the ritual. After being properly prepared he is taken, by his conductor, to the Lodge room where he is announced and his qualifications to proceed are stated.

Having been acknowledged as qualified he is received in due form and invited to kneel while a prayer is offered. He is then instructed how to approach the altar in the manner specific to that Degree and takes upon himself an obligation. The peculiar secrets of the degree are communicated to him and he receives certain lectures which serve to explain the historical background, the symbolism, and the moral lessons contained in the ceremony. Finally, he is welcomed by the presiding officer, presented to the Brethren or Companions, and directed to take his place among them.

This similarity between the degrees sets up a pattern of anticipation in the candidate and he comes to have certain expectations. He is conducted through the ceremony by one or two escorts, who he is encouraged to trust. In the ceremony of Initiation, he may be embarrassed when his conductor presents the charity box. The lecturer promptly sets his mind at rest, explaining that this was a test to show that he was truly poor and penniless.

Again, in the ceremony of Raising the candidate discovers that he represents the architect of the Temple and endures a re-enactment of the intimidation and distress suffered by the Principal Architect. He has, to some extent, been prepared for this by the opening prayer that includes the words 'fortitude', 'hour of trial', and 'valley of the shadow of death'; and later when the lecturer says "You have come through the ordeal scatheless and with a stout heart" he is reassured.

Now, against this background of established trust let us consider the degree of Mark Master Mason.

The candidate is directed, by his conductor, to carry a stone noticeably different from those carried by the conductors. Three times his stone is rejected by the Overseers and on the final occasion with assumed anger. He is ordered to "Stand aside" and his stone is heaved over among the rubbish. Our candidate

has now been humiliated on three occasions, by the rejection of his work and its unworthy treatment when it is thrown among the rubbish.

The candidate is now instructed to join the procession of craftsmen as they proceed to collect their wages. Despite doing precisely what he is told to do he finds himself accused of trying to obtain wages to which he is not entitled and only by the intervention of his conductor is he saved from an extreme punishment. The fourth humiliation.

He is then required to prove himself a Mark Man and after doing so he is, despite having presented a beautiful piece of work, instructed to labour in the quarries until his work is good enough.

This is now five times he has been publicly humiliated simply because he did what he was told to do. Is this inconsiderate sadism, or can we say anything in justification? Well perhaps we can.

Let us look at them. When the keystone was heaved over among the rubbish the candidate had been well prepared by hearing three times that the stone did not conform to the plans. When he is accused of attempting to obtain wages not his due and ordered to return to the quarries, to learn his trade, it was not known by the Worshipful Mark Master that he had produced a beautiful piece of work that was essential for the completion of the design.

This is quickly rectified when the work comes to a standstill and it is found that the work of our candidate is essential to further progress. The candidate is rewarded for his ingenuity, perseverance and humility while the Master Overseer is exposed as incompetent and arrogant.

In some constitutions, when the candidate attempts to obtain wages, the following explanation is given.

*" My Brother, this ceremony is introduced for the purpose of impressing on your mind, in the strongest possible manner, that a Mason should never under any circumstances, attempt to receive that which is not his just due, nor in any manner attempt to impose upon anyone, more especially a brother Mason; that should he do so, he is not only guilty of a great wrong but he also violates his solemn obligation."*

*Be careful, my Brother, that you receive no wages, here or elsewhere, that are not your just due, for if you do, you wrong someone by taking that which in God's chancery belongs to Him, whether that which you thus take be wealth, or rank, or influence , or reputation." .*

## HUMILIATION IN THE DEGREE OF MARK MASTER MASON

By O Cummins

In some ways every Masonic Degree is different, and we tend to think of them separately, in a vacuum, without reference to the others. Yet the ceremonies by which they are conferred exhibit a strong family resemblance. In each one, the candidate is prepared by being clothed in a peculiar fashion which is set down for our instruction in the ritual that is fixed by each Grand Lodge or Grand Chapter. Then, after being properly prepared, he is admitted to the Lodge or Chapter room, at the same time undergoing or participating in certain symbolical actions, which (if not self evident) are explained to him.

His entrance is followed immediately by either a prayer or a passage from the scriptures. Then his guides conduct him around the room one or more times. He is instructed how to approach the altar in a special manner for each Degree. He assumes the appropriate posture, and takes upon himself the obligation. The peculiar secrets of the degree are then communicated to him, and he is given certain lectures, which serve to explain the historical background, the symbolism, and certain moral lessons. Finally, he is welcomed by the presiding officer, presented to the Brethren or Companions, and directed to take his place among them.

This general similarity among the degrees sets up a pattern of expectation in the candidate. Without thinking, he comes to have certain presuppositions. In each degree he is conducted through the ceremony by one or two escorts, who are referred to repeatedly as his 'friends or guides', and he is encouraged to trust them. In the Craft degrees, his confidence is seldom misplaced. In the ceremony of Initiation, he may be a bit embarrassed when his guide, who knows that he has been deprived of all metals, presents the charity box for a contribution. The lecturer is appropriately apologetic, and explains, Believe me, Brother, this trial was not made with any desire to sport with your feelings, far from us be any such unworthy motive".

Again, at the most impressive point in the ceremony of Raising, the candidate soon realizes that he is intended to represent the architect of the Temple. Even though he meets an intimidating situation, it should come as no surprise. He has been psychologically prepared for it in a number of small ways, beginning when he hears a prayer that includes the words 'fortitude', 'hour of trial', and 'valley of the shadow of death', and continuing right up until the lecturer says, "Death can have no terrors equal to stain of falsehood and dishonour. Of this great truth the annals of Freemasonry afford a glorious example in the unswerving fidelity and noble death of our Master H.A.B."

Now, against this background of trust, consider the degree of Mark Master Mason. Because the candidate was directed by his guide to carry the keystone, and was instructed three times to present it to the Overseers, he saw it rejected and eventually heaved over among the rubbish, and then he was ordered to stand aside.

The WMM then announces 'that every faithful labourer is worthy of his hire, Bro. Deacons you have my command to assemble the craftsmen and march them in procession to the WICKET of the SW to receive their wages". The candidate is obviously included in the command.

In obedience to the command of the WMM, he is led to the apartment of the SW, but when (like those before him) he was instructed by his conductor to put his hand in at the wicket designated by the triangle. He was then accused of trying to obtain wages that were not his due, and was simultaneously threatened with a very drastic punishment. He was then requested to prove himself a craftsman, after doing this he was instructed, of all things, to return to the quarries and start all over again. (Don't forget the beautiful piece of work he had already produced).

This is now five times he has received a rejection, simply because he did what he was told to do, really when you analyse it, the candidate was publicly humiliated. Is this inconsiderate sadism, or can we say anything in justification? Well perhaps we can.

Let us look at them one by one. In the first instance, when the keystone was heaved over among the rubbish, the candidate had been prepared by hearing four times about the stone which the overseers refused and then rejected. Eventually, in fact, he finds out that the fault was not his, but belonged to the overseers, particularly to the master overseer for not recognising the importance and use of his stone.

In the second place, when he attempts to obtain wages, the lesson is explained in some jurisdictions as follows, and I feel it is worth repeating for I also feel that this is where our ritual fails to deliver a very powerful message. I quote," My Brother, this ceremony is introduced for the purpose of impressing on your mind, in the strongest possible manner, that a Mason should never under any circumstances, attempt to receive that which is not his just due, nor in any manner attempt to impose upon anyone, more especially a brother Mason; that should he do so, he is not only guilty of a great wrong but he also violates his solemn obligation."

Be careful, my Brother, that thou receiveth no wages, here or elsewhere, that are not thy just due, for if thou dost, thou wrongest someone by taking that which in God's chancery belongeth to Him, whether that which thou thus taketh be wealth, or rank, or influence, or reputation." What a powerful message this is.

The third embarrassment is contained in something just introduced by our USGC It involves the new ceremony called A Presentation of Aspects of Mark Master Masonry'.

When all have received their wages, it is found that the candidate has also received a similar amount, or penny. Dissatisfaction is expressed. The WM enquires "What is the meaning of this confusion?" The reply is "That although the craftsmen have been paid according to agreement they are dissatisfied because, having borne the heat and burden of the day, they were made equal to the candidate, who only came at the eleventh hour, each receiving a penny."

The WM asks the Brethren will they listen to the Law. The WM reads the parable of the vineyard labourers, (Matthew 20), and then says, "What say you now, are you satisfied?" The answer is "We are".

Once again, it is not he, but his Brethren who are at fault. They are reminded that it is not the length of time' that counts in the eyes of the Grand Geometrician, "but the use of that time', and that is what the youngest craftsman who, not being rigid in his attitudes and mindset, had recognized the singular form and beauty of the one indispensable stone passed over by all the other workmen.

Every thing in the ceremony, you see, is done for a purpose.

Unlike all other Degrees in Freemasonry, the Mark Degree has only one emblem, the Keystone, and the whole Degree is woven around this symbol. It not only bears the MMM mark and the mark of approval, but teaches us to appreciate the fact that honest work, faithfully performed, even though unappreciated by others, will vindicate itself and bring just rewards. It teaches us to practise charity of thought, as well as deed, and not to judge harshly or condemn others through lack of understanding.

The high ideals of the Mark Degree are eloquently set forth, in the beautifully worded 'Address after Closing' in the' MI ritual (i.e. ex NSW.

MMM.) The essence of which is 'whatever our successes or failures, whatever happens to us, our duty is to grasp firmly our Masonic Principles, that Mark Master Masons will never fail us, and remember