

SUPREME GRAND ROYAL ARCH CHAPTER
OF
NEW ZEALAND

HAURAKI DISTRICT

THE MARK DEGREE

Prepared for the use of the Companions by
RE Comp JD Anderson Grand Superintendent

THE MARK DEGREE

*(The following paper is largely based on a book "The Mark Degree"
by Bernard H Springett, published in 1931).*

I have been bothered by the number of Companions who, although Mark Masons, have apparently not appreciated the subtleties of the teachings of the Degree. I also have come to recognise that, few if any have studied, or even be aware of the fact of, the much varied history of the degree, believing that what is presented in the Supreme Grand Chapter of New Zealand is IT!!

This paper then is an attempt to remedy both of these matters.

It is my intention that, during my term as Grand Superintendent of the Hauraki District, this booklet should be presented to every Freemason who is advanced as a Mark Master Mason on the occasion of his advancement.

JD Anderson

Grand Superintendent

PREAMBLE

In New Zealand, the Mark Degree is conferred by the following Constitutions:

- The English under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons for England and Wales and its Colonies and Dependencies. It is a separate organisation from the United Grand Lodge which governs Craft Masonry in England and from the Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of England. Which has jurisdiction over the Royal Arch degree.
- The Scottish under the jurisdiction of both the Grand Chapter of Scotland and the Grand Lodge of Scotland. Scottish Freemasons can take the Mark degree either in their Lodge or in a Chapter. The degree is a prerequisite for Exaltation to the Royal Arch.
- The Irish under the Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Ireland.
- In New Zealand under the jurisdiction of the Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of New Zealand.

The actual story told in each ceremony is much the same, however various charges differ slightly and it is for this reason that the lessons are sometimes differently interpreted.

In addition to the foregoing, the Mark Degree origins are unknown but many early versions are available to students of masonry. These different versions highlight different moral teachings and have slightly differing ritual/charges to support the different philosophy.

SYMBOLISM and TEACHING (of the NZ version)

Mark Masonry is not an initial step in Freemasonry, for the skilled Craftsman has already learned the main principles that rule and govern all workmanship for the holy building that he is engaged in erecting. No doubt he has wrought many stones of fair and square proportions.

Now he is taught that each keen workman has a chance of distinguishing himself by the preparation, in accordance with the Divine Plan, of a special, superior piece of work, which will strengthen as well as adorn the whole structure.

His judgment and skill are not at once appreciated. His apparent presumption brings for a while disappointment in its train, but the unerring justice and appreciation of the Master and Divine Providence, finally lead to the recognition of work well and truly performed.

This is a prophetic lesson and we can calmly wait through the troubles and trials of this transitory life for the setting of the seal or mark of approval on every act, word, and indeed thought, which are honestly in keeping with the precepts and tenets laid down for us, individually as well as collectively, in the great Tracing Board of TGOOTU.

The rough ashlar on which the Apprentice spends many weary hours, attempting to fashion it into sufficiently smooth form to enable him to rank, after its acceptance by the superintendent of his stone-yard, as a Fellow of the Craft, has assumed a fresh shape and beauty. It has become the perfect ashlar, which is the cube, the Platonic symbol of Earth and is the Cope Stone.

The Key Stone, which he now sets about preparing, is inspired work and is a fraction of the Sphere of the Universe and is of another order from the Ashlar in its varying forms. When properly fashioned to accord with a carefully designed plan, it is set up in its place as the keystone of an arch or dome, to be wrenched forth in the succeeding Royal Arch Degree in the continued quest for the Lost Word.

In the Mark Degree we have the completion of an earthly temple, which we are accustomed to associate in symbolism with that of King Solomon, advanced a further and necessary stage. At the same time we are taught, as in the Craft and Royal Arch, what is the inner meaning of temple building.

In the whole of the Mark Ritual, but especially in the Charges and, above all, in the Closing, we find the finest elements of a deeper and more real belief. At what may be termed the crisis of the grade we are ordered to return to our labours in the quarries, and while still preparing portions of the structure of earthly temples here below, we hear also of a purely spiritual edifice, with a prominent place in it occupied by a stone rejected of the builders, which possessed merits to them unknown.

We are taught that we may look with a firm confidence towards being one day found worthy of the approving mark of the GOOTU as fitted for a place in that House not made with hands. And in all our seeming failures and rejections we can remember for our consolation that Stone which was rejected of the builders.

DIFFERENT VERSIONS

Some versions of the degree have as an essential part of the story the significance of a man's mark and the value/promise we all make as to recognising the mark of a fellow.

Recall that part of the obligation as follows:

"... that I will not unjustly use a Fellow craft's mark but will receive a Brother's mark when presented to me requesting a favour and grant his request, if just, and in my power to do so, without prejudice to myself or family; but I shall not feel myself bound to relieve him again until he shall have redeemed his mark from its former Obligation ..."

In some rituals we find this -

"The Candidate then retires, re-enters with the Deacons and presents his work, etc., as in the authorised ritual. After he has had his work finally approved he takes the O.B., in which there is one noticeable addition, the promise to relieve a needy Brother with at least the value of half a Jewish shekel of silver. This serves to introduce an interesting feature into the ceremony. The I.G. informs the W.M. that a stranger at the gate has brought a letter. This is read aloud by the W. M.

Dear Sir and Bro. M.M.M.,

"I am in great distress, and the loan of a small sum of money will materially assist me. Please lay my claim before your latest advanced Mark Man. The only security I have to offer is my Mark, which I enclose, to be returned with the money if refunded.

Yours fraternally,

R. M. S."

The Candidate is handed the Mark and asked if he is willing to relieve the necessities of the Bro. Mark Man. He pleads his inability and is told to return the Mark, which is done. The W.M. then proceeds: "Do you intend to return the mark in this manner? Remember that you are obligated to receive a Bro. Mark Man's Mark and grant him his request, or at least in returning it to him present him with an amount equal in value to half a Jewish shekel of silver, that is about a shilling, if in your power to do so. Where is this money that you have sworn to return with the Mark?" The Candidate repeats his plea of deprivation and his willingness otherwise. The ceremony then concludes on familiar lines generally, omitting the Working Tools, Warrant, etc."

In still another ritual, the candidate is told:

"It will be noted that the stone which the Craftsman first presented had been found accidentally by him in the quarries ... it is ascribed to the workmanship of H.A. himself." (see later for a development of this fact—JDA)

Another old ritual, known as the Dukinfield Ritual, was formerly used in some of the West Riding Lodges. In this the Lodge is opened in the 3rd Craft Degree, "in the name and fear of the Great Omnipotent," and the following are some of the interesting points in connection with it:

"The J.W., when asked by the W.M. how he will be proved, replies: "By the knowledge of that stone hewn by no mortal hand, which was rejected by the builders, but afterwards became the headstone of the corner."

The connection with the Craft is also shown in the closing. The J.W., asked what he has learned in the character of a M.M.M., replies: " I have learned three things-my duty towards GOD, my neighbour, and myself. To GOD by . . . " (as in Craft E. A. Charge).

Then comes a trial of strength which the Candidate has to undergo prior to advancement. He is told by the W.M. that before he can attain to the high Degree of a M.M.M. it is necessary for him to undergo a trial of strength to prove if he be an able and expert bearer of burdens. He is told to proceed round the Lodge and if, in his progress, he should meet with a stone of a peculiar form, to endeavour to lift and carry it, bearing in mind that he must only seize it with the points of his thumb and forefinger within half an inch of its summit. If he fails at the first attempt he must proceed on his way without it.

When he announces his failure he is told that it was not supposed that he would lift it and carry it in the manner he was instructed, but by rubbing the thumb and finger on the floor, the sand and grit that would have adhered thereto would have materially assisted him to lift and carry it. This, therefore, should prove to him that wisdom is preferable to strength for, by wisdom and ingenuity many things are begun, carried on and completed which would never have been accomplished by mere bodily strength."

Yet another old ritual source, Richard Carlile, he of the notorious "exposures", has this:

" The S.W. states that he [the candidate] entered the Lodge with five reports, all of them distinct and loud, to denote the number of this Degree as the fifth. He was then conducted round the Lodge five times to point out that without the full enjoyment of the five external senses he could not have received the privileges of the Degree of a M.M.M. After traversing from West to East he was commanded to kneel **to hear** and receive the benefit of the prayer; and, having been taught to repeat it from the delivery of the proper officer, the possession of this faculty was fully acknowledged.

"In the second round the Holy Bible was presented to him, from which he was desired to read a passage. This ceremony proved the faculty **of seeing**.

"In the third round the compasses were opened at an angle of ninety degrees and applied from the guttural to the pectoral part of his body, till his countenance, expressing emotion, denoted that he retained the faculty **of feeling**.

"In the fourth round a pot of manna was presented to him and, having partaken of its contents and declared them to be good, he was acknowledged to be in possession of the faculty **of tasting**.

He was then delivered over to the Senior Warden who conducted him for the last probation to the R.W. Master in the East where, standing in due form behind the

sacred altar, he was taught to kneel before the pot of incense; being commanded to pronounce [*by smell*] the nature of its contents he was acknowledged by the R.W.M. to be in possession of all the five external senses and was accordingly passed in due form to receive the Degree."

Composition of the Degree

In NZ, the degree really comprises residues of TWO degrees - the first that of "Mark Man", and the second part that of "Mark Master".

The first part, the Mark man, commemorates the ancient operative custom of fellowcraft workmen selecting marks which would forever distinguish them and their work for the purposes of reward and control.

The custom of individual marks was known in England as early as 1357. The Cathedral Church of Aberdeen has marked stones all the way up from the foundations.

Among the Steinmetzen of Germany when a mason attained the rank of fellow he took a solemn oath never to change his mark which he was obliged to engrave upon all of his work.

In operative masonry, marks were of two types - "banker" marks and "position" marks. The first was, the "signature" of the craftsman and identified his work for reward and control while the second were cut by the foreman or overseer to indicate the position of the stone in the building (we note a reference in our NZ degree to the "position stone" in our Lecture as those marks by which the overseers "denoted the juxtaposition of any two stones").

It would appear that not every fellow of the craft received a mark; it was a privilege granted only to a first class tradesman with the consent of the Master and the already qualified fellows.

Perhaps we have here the origin of the well-known saying "the work is/is not up to the mark"

The Steinmetzen

An interesting story comes from the records of the Steinmetzen of Germany that in the 15th century a spoiled stone was treated as a corpse, carried in procession on a bier and heaved over among the rubbish; the man who had dishonoured the craft was made to act as chief mourner and was later subjected to hearty thumps by his fellow workers!

What of the allegory of the degree?

R Ex Comp WHV Taine, (a Pastmaster of the United Masters Lodge No 167) wrote of the Mark Man himself, that

"... when he first appears it is as a Fellow Craft rightly seeking to better himself, a man of spirit. He enters the lodge symbolically heartened by the helping hand of the pass grip and pass word ...

He is designated a Mark Man and, no doubt much encouraged by that recognition of his qualities, goes to the quarries to prepare a specimen of his work.

It is a test of his ability and naturally he does his best; being a first class tradesman he produces a stone which could be fashioned and fitted only by a skilled man, familiar with the work of a special or particular branch of his craft.

He is an example of the initiative and skill, but most of all of the understanding of his calling which have always been the marks of a master in all spheres of work. What he produces is strange and unexpected and he shares the common fate of those who see further than their fellows; he endures it with the humility which, as we hear, often accompanies true genius."

How often have we known of the "keystone", rejected by the timid, the orthodox and the arrogant. How many prophets have been ordered to stand aside, been persecuted, imprisoned, stoned or crucified? Let us be careful to accept the lessons of the degree and take care that we do not impose the same fate on our fellows!"

The following **excerpts from two "exposures"** give details of the degrees of Mark Man and of Mark Master which are of interest:

Ritual of Freemasonry by anonymous:

"The right worshipful continues: "Brother, you have this evening represented one of the Fellowcraft Masons who wrought at the building of King Solomon's Temple, whose custom it was on the eve of every sixth day of the week to carry up their work for inspection.

"This young craftsman discovered in the quarries the key stone to one of the principal arches (which was wrought by our Grand Master Hiram Abif), and deliberately threw away his own work, and took it up to the Temple where it was inspected by the overseers, rejected (for the reason before explained), and thrown among the rubbish.

"He then repaired to the office of the senior grand warden to receive his wages; but not being able to give the token, he was detected as an imposter, which like to have cost him his right hand; but King Solomon pardoned him, and after a severe reprimand he was taken to the quarries.

"Previous to the completion of the Temple the progress of the work was interrupted for the want of a keystone, which circumstance being communicated to King Solomon, he gave orders that search should be made among the rubbish where it was found, and afterwards applied to its intended use."

Manual of Freemasonry by Richard Carlile

"WM: Give me the historical account of this degree.

"S.W: At the building of King Solomon's Temple, the valuable and curious key-stone, containing many valuable coins and the ten letters in precious stone work which Hiram Abif took so much pains to complete, was lost, supposed to have been taken away by some of the workmen, and a reward was offered by King Solomon for the speedy finding or making of another to fit the place.

"An ingenious Entered Apprentice made one and fixed it in the vacancy in the arch, which, being known to some of the Fellow crafts, they conceived it a disgrace to their

Order to let [one of] an inferior degree bear the palm of honour. They therefore, in the heat of jealousy, took it and threw it into the Brook Kedron, adjacent to the temple.

"A reward was also offered for the finding of this second stone, which excited the brother who had made it to go, with two other Entered Apprentices, in pursuit of it; and when they had found it, they received equally among them the last reward, and with it the degree of a Fellow Craft.

"The Brother who made it received the first reward to his own share for his ingenuity, and had the honour with his two Companions to fix it the second time in the arch, previous to which, the brother who made it cut on the under side the word Amasaphus; and in addition to his former rewards, he was honoured with the degree of Mark Man, which is done by going round the lodge of a Mark Man putting in his hands as a fellow craft to receive his wages.

"He is desired to state on what ground he claims those honours, and, having informed them of his discovery and what he had made, they then acknowledge his claim to be just; and he being desired to fetch the said key-stone, he finds it in his way to the arch, by kicking against the ring of it concealed under ground, the original key stone that Hiram Abif had made, with the proper characters and signatures to it. He is then taught to put in his hands in due form for the payment of his wages, after which he receives the secrets of this degree."

CONCLUSION

There are many different lessons to be learned from the various versions:

1. A man's "mark" is as much an "identifier" as his name; by its use we come to associate the character of the man with the "mark" or name. (Very much a link with the RA degree and the characters on the altar)
2. While obedience to orders or instructions is essential ("some must rule while others must obey") we learn that "blind" obedience makes us nothing greater than a machine!
3. That "genius" is rarely recognised at the outset; when it is, it is frequently greeted by jealousy and resistance.
4. For Christians ,the ever-present story of the stone that was rejected..."
5. I am sure each candidate, having given the degree sufficient thought, can add to this list.