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(This paper is intended to be handed to the Candidate after completing his Mark Degree.)

THE DEGREE OF MARK MASTER

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The essence of the Mark Degree is the ancient ceremony of registering a Craftsman's Mark. This changed very little during the evolution of Operative into Speculative Masonry, and it is, therefore the oldest of all the Ceremonies. The Scene is laid in a quarry or workshop, the operative masons 'lodge'.

The giving of his 'Mark' to the Craftsman was the most important thing that happened to him, an occasion for rejoicing. He had started his working life as a quarryman handling and hewing the rough stone, he may have been the son or relation of a Freemason, a fully qualified worker in 'free' stone, that is stone that could be shaped or carved. In the great days of cathedral building, there was not usually a formal apprenticeship, but rather recruitment from those already working locally, or brought by water, road transport being costly and difficult in the summer, as well as being impossible in the winter, therefore the carvings, moldings and capitals were prepared in the lodge or workroom attached to the quarry itself.

In due course the workman, if found worthy, was promoted to be a Fellow of the Craft, an essential part of this promotion was the receipt of his own peculiar mark. He inscribed this on each of the stones on which he had worked. It was his signature, it was unlikely anyway that he could write his name, and he was not allowed to change it. By it he was judged, it was his mark of integrity; by it his wages were paid. His mark was entered in the Mark Book, kept by the Wardens.

At every building the chief architect and builder was known as the Master of the Work. The raising and spending of the money was in the hands of Church officials, monks or equivalent clerics, and these were known as 'Wardens' and it was to them that the mason looked for his wages. No doubt he sometimes borrowed on his wages, thus 'pledging his mark', which was some device capable of being made with his tools of trade. The Hammer and the Chisel. Masons Mark are plainly to be seen on the stones in the great cathedrals and other church buildings of the Middle Ages, and the Craftsmen can be traced from job to job by their marks. There is no doubt that in addition to his Mark the medieval Freemason was entrusted with modes of recognition that enabled him to prove himself to his employers and to his fellow craftsmen.

Logically the Freemason receives his 'Mark' at the time he is advanced to the Degree of a Fellow Craft and so it was in the early of Speculative Masonry. For many years, especially in Scotland, this was the case. Later the Mark Degree became attached to the Order of the Royal Arch, except in England, where it has a separate existence. It will be noticed how closely we follow the operative tradition. Every mark man should be familiar with his own mark, and be able to inscribe it after his name, especially when attending a meeting where the Degree is being worked. The Lodge 'Mark Book' should be in evidence at such meetings, and each joining member have his name and mark inscribed therein.

The Mark Degree was recognised as early as 1723 when in an exposure called 'The Mason's Examination' we find the Master saying;

If a Master you would be,
Observed well the rule of Three
That what you want in Masonry
Thy Mark will set you free'

Prior to the 1813 Union, the Mark was worked in London and the Provinces under the shelter of Craft Lodges and Royal Arch Chapters of the Antients who encouraged extra craft workings in their Lodges. The Moderns actively discouraged such workings.

The Provincial Grand Lodge of Durham has a copy of the 1723 Constitution which was obviously transmitted from one Master to another. On the last page is a paragraph dated 'January 1756, Newcastle' which contains the words 'Bro X shall be made a Mark Master' which points to a definite Mark Ceremony. Previous to 1756 the words used were 'Bro X received his Mark' implying it was paid for and then received by the Bro.

Lodge Northumberland and Berwick has a Junior Wardens Chair dated 1641 with an axe carved on it. This suggests a Mark Degree could have been worked in Berwick as early as 1641. Unfortunately we have no proof that such was the case.

An influence in spreading the Mark Degree was the so called Travelling Lodges, the best known example being one often known as the Sunday Lodge at Ashton-under-Lyne.

This Lodge met in Cheshire for almost a century and a half. For many years it met invariably on a Sunday in any Craft Lodge Room available within an easy journey of its home in Dukinfield.

After the formation of the Grand Mark Lodge in 1856, it took the name of the United Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of the Ashton-under-Lyne District. As a lodge they combined Friendly Society and Masonic functions. Some twenty-four lodges were known to have been visited by the Travelling Mark Lodge.

The Grand Mark Lodge eventually threatened the Sunday Lodge's existence and in the course of time it accepted a Grand Mark Warrant to be consecrated in 1900 when thirty-six of its members were re-obligated.

Apart from its historical significance, and this should be made well known to the Brethren, the Mark Degree has many and important lessons to teach. We touch no part of life, but we leave our Mark upon it. We make no contact with our fellow men within or without the Lodge that does not result in an interchange of imprints. Our Mark is our signature, our warrant on integrity. Like the Marks of medieval Masons, dead these five centuries, ours will still be visible upon our work, when we have gone to join them.

It will be noticed that the Mark Degree consists of two parts. The first, or making of a Mark Man, is concerned with the giving of the Mark and instruction in presenting this to the Warden as a claim for wages due and demanded. The second part, formerly attached to the Third Degree, is that of Mark Master. In this part is enacted a very old story of the stone which the builders rejected, having merits to them unknown.

There is in the records of operative masonry an account of the manner of rejection of a spoiled or carelessly executed piece of work. The workman concerned was made to act as chief mourner at a mock funeral, his stone being carried on a bier to the 'charnel-house' of rejected stones, it was heaved over among the rubbish, and the culprit then received two or three blows or buffets from each of his fellow workmen.

How often inhuman experience has some unknown craftsman prepared what in the end has turned out to be the very keystone of human enlightenment. It is rejected by the timid, the orthodox and the arrogant. How many prophets have been ordered to stand still, been persecuted, imprisoned, stoned, or crucified?

We should ourselves be greatly concerned lest because of orthodoxy, timidly, or arrogance, we reject that which is different, or not in accordance with our plans. The Craftsman in our ceremony was fortunate that he lived to see his work approved, but how many of those others, of whom the world was not worthy, died having received not the promise.

May this portion of the Degree be to us consolation in affliction, encouragement in hope, and faith that in this life, as in that to come, the stone which the builders rejected possessing merits to them unknown in the end became the headstone of the corner.

So I suggest you consider well your Degree this evening which starts you on that exciting journey when you become a Royal Arch Mason.