

Mark Degree – Lecture (from the ritual)

At the building of KST and before the Institution of the Degree of Mark Master, there were 80,000 operatives employed, part of whom were hewers in the quarries of Zaredatha, and part builders of the Temple: besides those there was a levy of 30,000 in the forests of Lebanon.

In order that each of the 110,000 workmen might be known to his superior officer, every part of the work be subject to the nicest scrutiny, and, every faithful labourer receive with punctuality the reward of his industry and skill, this immense number was divided into 1,100 Lodges of FC and EA; the latter being under the superintendence of the former, who taught them their business; and over the whole presided 3,300 Menatzchim, Overseers, or Mark Masters, three over each Lodge. These are now called the MO, SO, and JO, but formerly all were known by the general name of Mark Masters or Overseers.

Each FC had a mark peculiar to himself, by which his work was known to his three Overseers. On the other hand, while the Overseers had but one mark in common with which they stamped their approval of a FC's work, they had other marks by which they denoted the juxtaposition of any two stones. Thus without difficulty was each individual's work known and recognised as perfect, and its proper place indicated.

The FC's were allowed to select any mark not previously chosen by another in their own Lodge; it consisted of 3, 5, 7, or any other odd number of lines joined together so as to form any figure they pleased except that of an **equilateral triangle** which was the Mark Master's Mark of approval, alluding to the symbol of the Deity.

Those 3,300 Overseers were again divided into 100 Lodges with 33 in each, each Lodge being presided over by three of their number who were also Mark Masters. These are now usually called the WM, SW and JW. They were selected by Hiram Abiff himself, and on them devolved the responsibility of paying the others their wages.

When the FC's and their Overseers, or Mark Masters, went to receive their wages, they put their hands in a different manner and at different wickets, so that if a FC presumed to put in his hand at a Mark Master's wicket, he was immediately detected as an impostor, and the JW stood at the SW's wicket with the Axe ready to inflict the penalty. This striking off of the right hand constitutes a part of the Penal Sign of a Mark Master, and as well as the other part, that is the smiting off of the right ear, was an ancient mode of punishment among the Sidonians.

The ancient word **Keбраoth** characterises the people, meaning Companions of the Mark but in most lodges where the English language is spoken the words **Mark Well** have been substituted. The grip refers not only to the adaptation of each portion of the work, part to part, but also to the peculiar mark of a Mark Master, the equilateral triangle

The Pass Word, **Joppa**, was chosen as such, either in consequence of the Degree having been established there by Hiram Abiff, or on account of the timber for the Temple, after having been prepared in the forest of Lebanon being carried in floats by sea to Joppa. Masonic tradition informs us that the shore at that place was so steep, it was impossible to ascend from the rafts without assistance from above, which was effected by persons stationed there for the purpose by the Strong Grip in Masonry, called "**Lewis**".

Could I also take you back to the Second Degree lecture where the reference is to the manner of the workmen receiving their wages?

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It was the duty of the Junior and Senior Overseers to examine each stone, not only as to its soundness, by giving three blows on it with a maul, and as to its finish, by turning it over, but also as to its having been made in exact accordance with the working plans, previous to its being passed to the MO, whose duty it was to see that it was perfect. If found perfect in every way, it received the Mark Master's mark, and was sent to the Temple from the quarries; but, if not, it was condemned and thrown among the rubbish. This was effected by two or more FC's taking it between them thus;(**Show**) and, after swaying it backwards and

forwards three times it was heaved over the precipice among the rubbish, from which circumstances is derived one of the signs called the Heave over Sign.

The other signs, namely the **Sign of Distress** and the **Sign of Thanksgiving** are also of early date, their use in this degree being ascribed to a special circumstance which occurred at the building of KST. Every sixth working day it was the custom of the Overseers, or Mark Masters, to wait on the Grand Master Hiram Abiff to receive the working plans as well as instructions for carrying on work, and keeping the men employed.

Part of one of these working plans appears to have been lost, but an ingenious and intelligent FC, either having seen the plan in his Overseer's possession, before any part was lost or having a good idea of it from the nature of the work, perceived that a stone of a peculiar form and construction was wanting to complete the design. Probably thinking to gain honour to himself by displaying superior knowledge, he immediately commenced blocking out such a stone, and after spending much time and labour thereon, ultimately finished it, and put his mark upon it. When the imperfect working plans were examined, no place was found for this particular stone. It was therefore deemed superfluous and the FC, instead of receiving honour, received angry words and reproaches for idling away his time, and in the heat of passion, the Master Overseer ordered the stone to be thrown over the precipice, which was accordingly done by two FC's, who were probably well pleased at what they deemed the humiliation of their companion's vanity. The sorrowful FC, on seeing the unworthy treatment of his work, **supporting his right cheek in the palm of his right hand said, "alas, alas my labour is lost"**. This is the third sign of the Degree, and is called the **Sign of Distress**.

The stone long lay neglected among the rubbish of the quarry. At length, however, the time drew near when the Key Stone of the Arch of the Vault of KST was required. Search was made for it at the Temple but it could not be found: and on further inquiry it was ascertained that no stone of the requisite form and construction had ever been brought there. The Overseers of that portion of the building then sent to the Overseers at the quarries, who had been entrusted with the plans and orders for this portion of the work, to enquire why this stone had not been forwarded with the others: and received for answer that there was no plan for any such stone among those entrusted to their care.

The work was at a standstill and the reason was speedily demanded by, and explained to Hiram Abiff who recollected not only drawing the plan, and writing instructions about the stone he wished to be finished in a peculiar manner, but also giving them himself to the MO. The latter being sent for was reprimanded for his carelessness in losing any portion of his plan and learning the nature of the stone required, recollected that that one of a similar description had been cut by one of his workmen. He immediately informed Hiram Abiff of this and added that, not finding it on his working plan, he had caused it to be rejected. Hiram Abiff at once sent for the FC who had cut the stone and from his replies perceived this must be the very stone required. Instant and careful search was made for it at the quarry and it was at last found undamaged.

As the MO had displayed so much want of knowledge of his working plans as not to be able to discover the use of the stone, Hiram Abiff deposed him from office and deprived him of the badge and insignia of the same, which he then conferred on the humble FC in approbation of his skill and ability, and advanced him to the honourable Degree of Mark Master in the Overseer's place.

The newly-made Mark Master was ordered to cut the Mark Master's mark of approval on the stone round his own, and outside of it eight letters, respecting which there is some ambiguity, owing to the tradition not having been retained in the original language, but they are generally considered to be equivalent to **Hiram The Widows Son Sent to King Solomon**.

The stone was conveyed to the Temple with much pomp and parade, and while it was being fixed in its place, the newly-made Mark Master, in an ecstasy of joy, clasped his hands in the manner described as the fourth sign of the Degree, and, looking upwards, exclaimed **"Thanks be to God, I have marked well"**.