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Steps and Stairs in Freemasonry (By Bro. W. E. Bate, J.W. Haata Lodge.)

We are constantly reminded that Masonry is a progressive science. It is not surprising, therefore, that the stop by which we progress from one point to another and the stair by which we ascend from lower to higher levels occupy an important place in our ceremonies. I think we can with advantage moralize upon the step and the stair. It will be understood that I am dealing with the relation of this subject to Craft-Masonry only, and not to other Orders such as the Royal Arch-Masonry or Rose Croix Masonry. Many present who are associated with these Orders will immediately perceive the application of the subject to these and possibly other Orders in Masonry as well as to Craft-Masonry. The subject falls into three or four divisions.

In the first place, let us consider the regular steps of which there is one in each degree. In some Lodges in this country the candidate is admitted to the strains of :

"Lead kindly Light amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on ; keep Thou my feet,
I do not ask to see the distant scene,
One step enough for me."

This is a singularly appropriate ode when we consider that one step. Properly regarded, the step may be considered as an act of faith. We learn that the E.A. Degree represents the advent of all men on this their mortal existence. It symbolizes the period of youth. The F.C. Degree represents man in middle age having arrived at the maturity of mental and physical stature. In the M.M. Degree we reach that stage where "the keepers of the house shall tremble and strong men shall bow themselves; the grinders shall cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened"—a most picturesque description of that stage of life which presages the dissolution of physical and mental faculties. Yet in each of these degrees there is the one step to be taken. At every stage of life we are expected to progress towards life's fulfilment, led on by Him to Whom we have at the outset declared our trust, content not to ask to see the distant scene—"one step enough for me." Life has no short cuts. Nevertheless, in all this pilgrimage we are not alone, being accompanied by the Deacon after being assured by the W.M. that where the Name of God is invoked no danger can ensue.

In the second place, consideration may well be given to the steps by which the candidate approaches the East. Here we have a link with the ancients. All learning and culture had its origin in the East. It was in that direction that men must travel in search of enlightenment. The West was the region where barbarian hordes, the Huns of old, held sway, and where ignorance resided. Thus to go East was to seek for the light, while to go West was to identify oneself with darkness. In more recent days this latter expression has been given the more extreme meaning of to perish utterly. These steps, unlike the regular steps, vary in each degree according, it may be assumed, to the degree of enlightenment which the candidate has already received. In the E.A. Degree the steps are irregular in length, suggestive of the stumbling and erratic course taken by one endeavouring to find his way in complete darkness. The ode used in some Scottish Lodges for the encouragement of the candidate in this Degree is:

"Courage, Brother, do not stumble,
Though thy path be dark as night ;

There's a light to guide the humble,
Trust in God and do the right."

It merits notice that each step is taken with the l . . . f . . . This is a survival of the ancient belief illustrated in many Egyptian legends, that to face one's difficulties with the l . . . f advanced is to ensure success. It was thus that the god Horns advanced to slay the serpent Apep—a legend typical of many which symbolize the inevitable victory of day over night, of knowledge over ignorance. The, idea of the left being aggressive survives even in political terminology. The term "left wing" is generally applied to the reactionary element in politics. The word "left" also in its Latin counterpart "sinister" has through the centuries deteriorated in its meaning. Conversely to advance the right foot is to go in peace. Thus does the Moslem enter his mosque, and among many native tribes it is to offer the gravest insult to enter the home otherwise than with the right foot advanced.

In the F.C. Degree the steps are quite different. The only reference in the V.S.L. to the winding stairs is in 1 Kings, chapter 6, verse 8. If we treat this legend as being strictly historical we are confronted with an absurdity. The Book of Kings gives us the measurements of King Solomon's temple. When we remember that the cubit was the ancient measurement of the distance, between elbow and the tip of the middle finger, we discover that King Solomon's temple probably did not exceed in measurement a length of 150 feet and a breadth of 100 feet (rather more than a quarter of an acre, in area), while the middle chamber did not exceed a width of about 10 feet. Remembering that it is recorded that there were 80,000 workmen engaged on the building of the edifice we begin to see how absurd it is to say that it was to this chamber that the workmen repaired to receive their wages. The legend, while not acceptable as history, is nevertheless a beautiful allegory given to us to assist in the search for truth and enlightenment. A study of the T.B. Lecture reveals that the E.A. first entered between the pillars which meant strength and establishment, and when conjoined stability. Thus we have the important truth that before the winding stairs can be ascended the candidate, must have laid that foundation of stability of character and purpose without which no true progress in life can be made. He ascends three flights of steps numbering 3, 5 and 7, describing a quarter-circle in his course. The course he takes reminds us of the fact that it is impossible in this life always to see the full results of our actions or the end of our course from the beginning. As the candidate stands at the foot of the stair he is unable to see where the winding stairway leads him. It is symbolic of the intricate windings of this mortal life, but if the course upon which one is embarked is followed with resolution and with confidence in the G.A.O.T.U.I. we are led to that great discovery which in the position adopted by the F.C. is found to be located in the centre of the building—the letter "G," denoting God, T.G.G.O.T.U., to Whom we must all submit and Whom we, ought humbly to adore. Robert Burns in one of his poems speaks of it as "the hieroglyphic bright which none but craftsmen ever saw." We may also regard these stairs as symbols of self-discipline—the only sort of discipline worth while and they should teach us that the motto of the F.C. should always be "Excelsior." Some enlightenment is thrown on this branch of the subject by a lecture delivered on one occasion by Bro. Brockelhurst (M.A., Cantab.) in which he says:

"In considering the explanation of the Second Tracing Board I deem it necessary to state my attitude towards the Hebraic History with which our ceremonies area interwoven. Frankly, I reject the lot.

"The Temple of Jerusalem never became in Solomon's days, nor in any other, an object of admiration to the surrounding nations. The surrounding nations of that period were vastly in advance of the Israelites in all that civilization connotes. Inhabiting as they did a very small quarter of the globe, an area less than Wales, without manufactures, natural wealth, or even a literature, they were a wholly insignificant people. Persia, Greece, Syria, Egypt, Rome, all in turn conquered and captured them. For five hundred years B.C. they were a servile race. Christianity has given them a, dignity and position to which they were never entitled. Those who frame-our ceremonies have overlaid the Greek mysteries with Hebraic fables. I reject as utterly unhistoric any reference to King Solomon and the stories associated with Hiram Abiff. These things are allegories. They never had any historic foundation. I am of opinion that the real basis of the teaching of the Second Degree is to be found in the fact that when our ancient Brethren had entered the Porch and arrived at the foot of the Winding Staircase they were met with a demand for the pass-word which indicated an ear of corn. This is the link with the mysteries of Eleusis. It symbolizes Demeter, or in Roman times Ceres, the Goddess of Corn or Plenty, and conveys to the initiate the glorious hope of Resurrection and Immortality. All the rest of the Explanation of the Tracing Board in so far as it is Judaic is in my opinion pure undiluted nonsense. The grand secret of all is revealed in the concluding words which point to the object of all

life's training and research. Their attention is finally drawn to certain Hebrew characters which represent the Sacred Name. In short, the end of life is to find the embodiment of the Highest. This is at one the process and end of Education."

We come now to the steps by which the M.M. approaches the East. They are seven in number. This is the perfect number and is found in the degree we call Sublime. The philosophy this degree is well summed up in the verse :

"I fear no foe with Thee at hand to bless,
Ills have no weight and tears no bitterness ;
Where is death's sting?
Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still if Thou abide with me."

The steps are so arranged as to symbolize a triumph over the grave and, that triumph accomplished, the candidate boldly marches forward to whatever life may bring. Thereafter he can contemplate death with equanimity, secure in his trust in the M.H.

There remains for consideration briefly the reference in the first T.B. Lecture to Jacob's Ladder. Here again we are concerned not with history but with allegory. Whether Jacob had his dream or not matters little. It matters much that we have presented to us an allegory showing us a way of escape to higher purpose. It rests on the V.S.L. Thus it teaches us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The zealous Brother will find room for reflection in a comparison of the passages in Ezekiel, chapter 3, verses 1-3, and Revelations, chap 10, verses 8-10. I can do no better on this branch of the subject than to read to you a passage from the Lectures dealing with Jacob's Ladder:

"Rebecca, the beloved wife of Isaac,, well knowing by Divine inspiration that there was a peculiar blessing vested in the soul of her husband, was desirous to obtain it for her youngest son Jacob, though by birthright it belonged to Esau, her firstborn. Jacob was no sooner in possession of his father's blessing than he was obliged to fly from the wrath of his angry brother Esau, who, in the moments of rage and disappointment, had threatened to slay him. As he journeyed towards Padan-aram, a distant country in the land of Mesopotamia, to take to himself a wife from the daughters of Laban, his mother's brother, a peculiar circumstance befel him. At the close of the first day's journey. Being weary and benighted, and having no hospitable mansion near, he laid himself down to rest, taking the earth for his bed, a stone for a pillow, and the celestial canopy of heaven for a covering. It was there, as he slumbered, in a vision he beheld a Ladder, whose top reached to the heavens and whose bottom rested on the earth, on which the Angels of the Lord were ascending and descending. It was there the Almighty entered into a solemn league or covenant with Jacob, telling him if he would walk in His ways, and abide by His commands, He would not only bring him back to his father's house in peace and prosperity, but would make of his seed a great and mighty nation.

"This was afterwards amply verified, for after an absence of twenty years, Jacob returned, and was kindly received by his brother Esau; his favourite son Joseph was by Pharaoh's appointment made the second man in Egypt, and the children of Israel, highly favoured of the Lord, became in process of time the most mighty nation on the face of the earth.

"Q.: Of how many staves or rounds was this ladder composed?

"A.: Of as many staves or rounds as there are Moral Virtues ; but there are three principal ones, namely, Faith, Hope and Charity.

"Q.: Why Faith, Hope and Charity?

"A.: Faith in the Great Architect of the Universe, Hope in Salvation, and to be in Charity with all men.

"Q.: There follow beautiful illustrations on each. I will thank the next Brother for Faith.

"A.: It is the foundation of justice, the bond of amity, and the chief support of civil society. We live and walk by Faith; by it we have a Hope and acknowledgment in the existence of a Supreme Being; are justified,

accepted and finally received. A true and sincere Faith is evidence, of things not seen; the substance of those hoped for. This well maintained and answered, by walking according to our Masonic profession, will bring us to those blessed mansions where we shall be eternally happy with God the, Great Architect of the Universe.

"Q.: Hope?

"A.: Is an anchor for the soul, both sure and steadfast and entereth into that within the veil. Then let a firm reliance on the Almighty's faithfulness animate our endeavours, and teach us to fix our desires within the limits of His most blessed promises, so shall success attend us. If we believe a thing to be impossible our own despondency is capable of rendering it so, but he who perseveres in a just cause will ultimately overcome all difficulties.

"Q.: Charity?

"A.: Ever lovely in itself, is one of the brightest gems that can adorn our Masonic profession. It is the best test and surest proof of the sincerity of our religion. Benevolence attended by Heaven-born Charity is. an honour to a nation whence it springs, is nourished, and cherished. Happy is the man who has sown in his breast the seeds of benevolence; he envieth not his neighbour, he believes not a tale when told by a slanderer. Malice or revenge having no place in his breast, he forgives the injuries of men. And, as we are brethren, let us be ever ready to listen to him that craveth our assistance, and from him who is in want let us not withhold a liberal hand. So shall a heart-felt satisfaction reward our labours, and the produce of Love and Charity will most assuredly follow."

Finally, let us consider briefly the numerology of our subject. We find constantly recurring the numbers 3, 5 and 7. Three, no doubt, is the most important number in our system. It is a reminder of the connection of our system with that of the Kabbalists who were governed by a triad or three principal officers. We have the three knocks. Some scholars relate this to the exhortation, "Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you." Having regard to the connection of our system with the pre-Christian era one may be excused for doubting the authenticity of this opinion. There are the 3 degrees, 3 flights of steps. The pillars of strength, beauty and wisdom, the 3 principal rungs of Jacob's Ladder, the 3 entrances to the temple, the, 3 classes of workmen. Three lodges were formed to assist in the search for H.A.—the 3 working tools in each degree. These, are but a few of the occasions when this number comes into prominence. Likewise the number 5 is constantly in evidence. There are the 5 steps, the 5 p.o.f., the 5 signs in the Third Degree, the 5 who hold the Lodge, and so on. Seven make the Lodge perfect. There are 7 stars in the first T.B. which may be compared with those referred to in Revelations, chapter 1, verses 12-16. The importance of this number may well be related to the fact that to the ancient astronomers only 7 planets were known, while to the alchemists there were only 7 metals known, just as to the men of culture the arts and sciences, namely grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, music, geometry and astronomy, number 7. The Goths had 7 deities and they gave us the names of the days of our week. The sum of these three important numbers is 15, and this number also has its special significance. There were 15 steps in the winding staircase. Among the Hebrews this was a sacred number. The numerical value of the letters J.H., the symbol of the Ineffable Name, was 15. Thus this number symbolizes God Himself. The following arrangement of the components of 15 was formerly regarded as a sacred talisman. It will be observed that the numbers add to 15 whether added horizontally, vertically or diagonally.

8	1	6
3	5	7
4	9	2

Thus Freemasonry in allegory and teaching should keep our thoughts directed towards God. Our steps should all be in one direction, onward and upward through the paths of heavenly science even to the Throne of God Himself.