

CURIOUS MASONIC WORDS

COMPASSES-.COMPASS. From the standpoint of the dictionary, these are two words with totally different meanings. A COMPASS is a suspended magnet so balanced that it may turn upon its pivot and orient itself with the North magnetic pole and thus (with the aid of tables and mathematics), point out the true North. Compasses is the word used to describe that instrument which draws circles and/or measures small distances; sometimes compasses are called dividers. Like trousers and scissors, compasses is always plural when meaning the instrument-except in six Grand Lodges of the United States which use the word COMPASS in the same way as their neighbours use compasses.

COMPASS is from the Latin Corn (with) and passus (a step) - an instrument which is used "with a step" - in other words, dividers. Masonically, it appears to be more a measuring than a circle drawing instrument, although reference to its Masonic use includes "circumscribe desires." But its position, open sixty degrees upon a quadrant, as in the symbol of a Past Master, (U.S.) would seem to indicate that it is more as dividers than as an instrument to draw arcs of circles, that it is important Masonically.

With the square it forms two of the three Great Lights of Masonry and has become so universally recognized as a symbol of Freemasonry that courts have forbidden its unauthorized use or its being copyrighted or trademarked for commercial purposes.

In days of old, men fought, bled and died over arguments as to the proper name of Deity, and to win a discussion as to how many angels could dance together on the point of a needle!

Moderns do not go as far as bloodshed over the word "'tele" (pronounced hail), but in spite of the determinations of philologists and Masonic authorities who may well be considered final, now and then some more or less learned

Freemason wishes to change either the meaning of the word or its pronunciation, or its spelling, or any two, or all three!

Hele is almost invariably associated with the word "conceal" (as it should be) and "hele and conceal" may be translated by transposition - "conceal and hele". "Hele" is old Angle-Saxon helan, meaning to conceal. "Conceal" is Norman, and means to hide. Dr. Pease has well brought out that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries language in England was part Norman-French and part Anglo-Saxon and that early ritual writers, desiring to make sure that no misunderstanding was possible, often expressed ideas in word pairs, one word from each language. Hence such phrases as "hele and conceal", "parts and points", "Free will and accord", etc.

To the objections of those who contend that "hele" should be pronounced "heel" because it rhymes with "conceal and reveal" the answer is that in the early days of the language, our "conceal" was pronounced "consayle" and our "reveal" was pronounced "revayle".

The word "hele" (meaning to hide) has no connection with the word "heal", meaning to make whole again, or Masonically, make legitimate, nor with the word "heel", meaning part of the foot, or with the word "hale", meaning in good health, or the word "hail", meaning to call to, or greet.

The ABIF of Hiram Abif does not appear in the Bible. The word Abi or Abiw or Abiv is translated in the King James version both as "his father" and "my father" - using the word "father" as a term of respect and not as denoting a parent. Hiram, the widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali, was "my father" in the same sense that Abraham was "my father" to members of the tribes of Israel.

The thought that the two syllables are a surname is obviously in error. The legend gains, not loses, in appeal when Abif becomes a title of honor. Just when and how it came into the Masonic terminology is still a moot point; it does not appear in the Regis document (oldest of our Constitutions, dated approximately 1390) but

does appear -only as one name among many - in the Dowland manuscript of 1550. Apparently the term was not in common use until after the King James Bible (1611) had become familiar in Masonic circles.

The story of Hiram Abif as told in the Masonic tale is not found in the Bible, nor is there any meaning in the word which can be construed as part of the story as Masons tell it, except that of veneration.

Note by Ed.

In my 1867 Ostervald 'Sante Bible' (French) Holy Bible dated 1867, the translation is still "Hiram mon pere" (my father). However. Luther's translation as recorded in my 1856 Heilige Schrift (German Holy Bible) is "Huram Abif"

Huram & Hiram appear to be interchangeable in both the English and German translations, as the Book of Chronicles uses Huram, while in the Book of Kings it is Hiram.

With the French translation, they are the same in both books.