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THE THIRD DEGREE EXPLAINED

Compiled by WOR. BRO. JOSEPH A J LYND

This paper is based on the third of a series of lectures I prepared for delivery to candidates in my own Craft Lodge, Murray No. 177H (UGLQ). It draws heavily on "What the Ritual Does not Explain in the Three Degrees" by Wor.Bro.Mel Moyle, to whom I am indebted. As this was a Victorian publication I have modified some aspects to reflect Queensland ritual as well as Murray's own variation, which is basically old NSW ritual.

Introduction

As the purpose of the Entered Apprentice degree related to both birth and preparation, and the Fellowcraft degree to gaining knowledge, so the Master Mason degree is concerned with old age, death and the resurrection to an everlasting life. The Master Mason is old, not in age, but in years of wisdom and understanding. This degree is referred to as the Sublime degree as in it, death is preferable to falsehood and dishonour.

In the early days the Mason started work at dawn. The Lodge had entrances in the east, south and west. The Master and his two Wardens stood at the entrance with a candle to show the way. Hence the three candles on the pedestals, although today they are generally of the electric variety. As it is the Master's duty to give light and instruction to his Lodge, his candle is never extinguished while the Lodge is at work. The candidate is seated in the SE portion of the Lodge, recognising the progress he has made.

Preliminary Examination

In answering the questions prior to being raised to the Third degree:

The hidden mysteries of nature and science refer to:

- hidden mysteries related to research
- in nature, what makes the wind to blow and the grass to grow, nature being the physical evidence of the work of the Grand Geometrician i.e. our environment.
- in science, what makes the earth to spin and the air to thin, science being that plain truth which we develop as an end product of our intelligence.

These mysteries were made and are controlled by the Grand Geometrician, while Man was left to contemplate and explain such mysteries.

As the Operative Masons received their wages in the Middle Chamber, so the Speculative Mason receives blessings as he has obeyed or disregarded the Grand Geometrician's divine commands.

Without scruple or diffidence, because their knowledge had advanced through patience and perseverance, and because of the trust in their teachers of spiritual knowledge and Masonic lore.

Without scruple or diffidence where diffidence means lack of trust.

The two great pillars are capped, one by a terrestrial globe, representing labour and physical wisdom on earth, and one by a celestial globe, representing *intellect* and the spiritual wisdom of the heavens.

Opening

The Entered Apprentice travels from the west to the east to seek light, while the Master Mason travels from the east to the west, to spread that light and wisdom. The Lodge is opened on the centre, indicating all Master Masons are equidistant from an imaginary point that signifies perfection. Being equidistant also makes them equal. The point within a circle has a number of connotations. The simplest of these is that the point is man and the circle is the field over which his influence is exercised.

Thinking man soon realizes that his field is subjected to outside influences from the Ruler of the Universe and that the circle is the universe. When the point within the circle is capped by the VSL and two parallel lines added, originally representing St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist, the patron saints of Freemasonry representing perfection on earth, we then have a frame within which the Master Mason cannot materially err. This frame therefore contains the sacred symbol.

The circle is found in abundance in nature, so its use by ancient tribes as a sacred symbol is a logical progression. The tree and its fruit, the sun and the moon and the raindrop, all embrace the circle.

We have progressed from the Great Architect, the designer in the First Degree, to the Grand Geometrician, the thinker in the Second Degree, to the Most High, the Ruler of the Universe in the Third Degree. The sequence of knocks changes to acknowledge that the soul and spirit have gained ascendancy over matter.

Entry

In this degree we pass from the darkness of death to the fight of resurrection. On admission, the prayer "finally rise from the tomb of transgression" relates to death and immortality right from the start of the ceremony.

Circumambulation

Circumambulation is still clockwise, despite the concept that the reverse direction typified death. Our belief in immortality demands such direction of movement.

Mode of Preparation

Both arms are bare as both hands are placed on the VSL.

Both breasts are bare, as the compasses, acting on the centre, describe their circumference.

The candidate kneels on both knees so they are both bare.

Both heels are slipshod. In the earlier degrees, one heel only was slipshod according to ancient custom, this being a sign of fidelity to our fellow man. Now we recognise another ancient custom, that of entering barefoot any sacred place, or upon holy ground. The testimony of man to man has been upgraded to that of man to his Creator.

God said unto Moses at the burning bush "put off thy shoes from thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground". The High Priest entered the Sanctum Sanctorum barefoot. Likewise, Pythagoras Insisted that his disciples offer sacrifice and worship barefoot.

Advancing to the East

The first three steps involve the fear of falling into the unknown, but having survived that, the next four are bold or marching, approaching with confidence the east, the source of resurrection, and of light, truth and knowledge. The three represents the spirit and the four represents matter.

The first three steps, in the form of a cross, depict the spirit passing over the body. The four bold or marching steps trample the desires of the body. The first three steps also locate the positions of the three ruffians. In the Second degree five represented man, now seven represents perfect man.

Obligation

During the obligation both points on the VSL are exposed. In ancient symbolism we have the earth signified by the square. and the sun and heavens as a circle produced by the compasses. The square symbolises what is earthly and material, the compasses what is heavenly and spiritual. In this degree the spiritual has attained full control over the material.

Our teachings have controlled the passions of the heart and have developed the mind to expose both points. Heart and mind are liberated. Emotion and thought are united. The moral and spiritual virtues have subordinated the material desires.

The Raising

The chequered, tessellated or Mosaic pavement dates back to the great Egyptian temple of Ammon Ra of 1900BC, a massive temple of many pillars supporting a roof of solid sandstone. From the darkness of this temple, priests set forth to seek the light, which was beyond a doorway, flanked on one side with a black obelisk and on the other side by a white obelisk. Those who survived the ordeal found the light emanating from the all-seeing eye of Horus

The pavement is regarded as holy ground and teaches us how difficult it is to reach the Glory of the Lord without first overcoming the forces of good and evil symbolised by the black and white squares. In this degree the Mosaic pavement represents the Sanctum Sanctorum, the Holy of Holies, above which is the letter 'G', so that the candidate in his spiritual temple, may generate a place for the Deity to dwell. As St. Paul said "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you? "

The concept of death and resurrection is strong in all ancient mysteries. Up until 1740 such a concept was symbolised in Noah, as the Sloane MS of 1646 does not mention Hiram Abif or the Master's degree. The concept was changed to Hiram Abif as the translation from Hebrew was more appropriate and this legend is strictly Masonic in origin. We are "not to attempt to extort the secrets of a superior degree", hence the conspirators.

The murder by three ruffians has many interpretations. The sun dies during the three winter months, to be rediscovered in spring with a return to life. The enemies of political freedom were kingcraft, priestcraft and ignorance. The three who condemned Christ were the priest, the politician and the mob. Three places where Christ was condemned were before Caiaphas, Herod and Pilate. The three assaults on Christ were the blow to the cheek, the scourging and the spear in his side. Three renegade Knights Templar falsely accused Jacques de Molay. Three major misfortunes that befell the Jews were the Egyptian bondage, the Babylonian captivity and the destruction of the Temple by the Romans, in 70AD.

Continuing the seasonal theory where the three ruffians are the northern hemisphere winter months of December, January and February, becoming progressively more severe. It proves a slip could be the spring months of March, April and May, generating the five points of fellowship, which follow as June, July, August, September and October. Some constitutions, such as our own (UGLQ) merely refer to the three ruffians, while others are more specific. For example the Americans name these ruffians as Jubela, Jubelo and Jubelum. In the degrees called Elus we have Romvil (a corruption of Cromwell), Gravelot and Abiram, while in another Elu version they are Hoben, Sterkin and Oterfut (which means outside the door). Elu is a French word meaning elected and the degrees detail the detection and punishment of the three conspirators involved in the slaying of Hiram Abif. The Elu degrees are found in a number of Masonic Rites. It is the fourth degree in the French Rite, the ninth, tenth and eleventh in the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite and is incorporated in the Master's Degree of the American York Rite. In the degree of Heredom in the Royal Order of Scotland the ruffians were named as Cain, Achan and Eni.

As similar legends to that of Hiram Abif are typified in many ancient mysteries, its use in Freemasonry recognises the antiquity of our teachings. The location of each attack has also varied with time:

- In 1717 it was at the three principal entrances to the Temple.
- These then became the east, west and south doors.
- In 1813 they became the north, south and east entrances.
- In Scotland it is at the east, south and west.
- In the USA it is at the south, west and east.
- France changed from south, north and east to west, south and east.

Whilst such an array reveals confusion and lack of discipline, all recognise three entrances rather than three ruffians at one entrance.

The murder at high twelve refers us to the ancient symbolism where twelve denotes completion. Twelve months completes the year, the Zodiac has twelve signs; the cube, that perfect geometrical figure, has twelve edges.

The fatal weapons have changed with time. In 1717 they were the setting tool, the setting maul and the setting beetle. Later these became the 24-inch gauge, the square and the gavel. Then the setting tool, the square and the rule and now the plumb rule, the level and the heavy setting maul.

The first attack causes Hiram Abif to sink on his left knee, the knee on which he knelt in the First Degree. The second ruffian causes him to sink on his right knee, as in the Second Degree. The third ruffian causes him to be positioned under the letter G, representing the most powerful force *in* existence.

Ecclesiastes represents another solemn passage in the ceremonial. There is some doubt as to when this piece of scripture was written. An analysis of the original Hebrew language used, favours around 700BC, thus eliminating Solomon as the author. Then, as now, the author was confused about his place in life. The early chapters examine the problem and our ritual refers to the summary of his findings. After the earthly experiences of sadness and happiness, poverty and wealth, fear of God is the solution to the vanity of life. Here death through frailty leads to God's scrutiny of good and evil and to immortality.

The term it proves a slip' reminds us that the lessons of the third degree comprise death, decay and resurrection. The Hiram legend revealed in Prichard's "Masonry Dissected" of 1730 introduces this concept based on the delay of nine to fifteen days to find the body. In the French ritual the Master Mason's word is translated as meaning 'the flesh falls from the bones'. The strength and perseverance of the First Degree and the wisdom and knowledge of the Second Degree all prove a slip. Only by the Five Points of Fellowship can we be raised from a figurative death.

The Five Points of Fellowship appear in the "Edinburgh Register House" MS of 1696, but it was not until "Three Distinct Knocks" of 1760 that they are explained. The Scriptures reveal that Elijah, Elisha and St. Peter all restored life by a frontal body contact with the dead. The five points represent the centre and the four corners, from which the intended structure was raised. Just as the physical structure was so raised, so is the spiritual building raised.

The Five points of Fellowship can be symbolised by the pentalpha or five-pointed star, which was adopted by Pythagoras as a secret symbol representing health. Its five points symbolise the five senses of hearing, seeing, feeling, smelling and tasting, because all knowledge comes through these five senses. Some Lodge Rooms, such as that of Lodge Bartle Frere No.254 at Babinda in Far North Queensland have a golden coloured five-pointed star at the centre of the Mosaic pavement. This is usually referred to as the 'blazing star' and when the candidate is placed between it and the letter 'G' he in his spiritual temple, generates a place for the Deity to dwell. It is believed that King Solomon had the pentalpha engraved on the foundation stone of the Temple. The plans of some ancient castles and cathedrals incorporate this star and the human figure is also a crude representation of it.

The grip sometimes known as the lion's paw has a number of ancient references. It is the emblem of the tribe of Judah, who were the ancestors of Jesus. It is also the means, in Egyptian mythology, by which Osiris, when found, was lifted back to life. It is an unbreakable bond of friendship, Brother to Brother. In the second of the Five points of Fellowship we pledge to help another, even though he may be on the lowest spoke of fortune's wheel. The third is sincerity in prayer for a Brother in need, while the fourth recognises trust in the welfare of another.

The final point protects a Brother's good name from the unwarranted attack of his fellow man.

The light of a Master Mason is that faint glimmer which contrasts with the dark mystery of the 'prospect of futurity' that awaits us all. This glimmering light represents our brief and flickering life span, while outside is the darkness of the mysterious veil through which we must pass to immortality. 'Perform your allotted task while it is yet day' reminds us to perform creditably in youth before we enter the darkness of death. The exhortation 'to lift our eyes to that bright Morning Star whose rising brings peace and salvation' reminds us that the Morning Star or Venus, the herald of the new day, brings joy and gladness and the light to work and learn. With each newborn day, man rises to a new life, a life of this world or of immortality. Despite the de-Christianising of the ritual, the bright Morning Star represents Jesus Christ. In Egyptian mythology it would have referred to Sirius, whose rising marked the flooding of the Nile, which annually brought salvation to the people of Egypt.

Standing on the 'brink of the grave' reminds us of the certainty of death, where sadness is transformed into the joy of an everlasting life. The Emblems of Mortality represent the highest and humblest parts of the frame. The skull is the seat of the brain and soul, while the thighbones being near the grosser organs of the body, are associated with animal passions.. The use of the skull and crossbones can be traced back to the ancient Hittites around 1850 BC.

The Secrets

The penal sign is an extension of another ancient Hebrew custom when making a covenant. A calf was selected, its throat cut across, its heart torn out and examined for imperfections or disease, and if clean the carcass was divided into two parts, which were placed to the north and to the south. The parties to the covenant then passed between the two parts, east to west, and the entire carcass was then burnt to ashes. If the carcass had been found to be unclean it was left as prey to the ravenous birds of the air and the devouring beasts of the field.

The Five Points of Fellowship, represented by the five-pointed star, may be further explained thus:

First – A Master Mason should never withdraw his hand from a *brother in* need. Charity should not be restricted to giving or lending money. Guidance, moral support or free labour may be equally effective in relieving his necessities, but charity has to be within prudent limits. With regard to the grip, the lion has always been regarded as a symbol of might or royalty. An ancient Egyptian tomb painting depicts a lion seizing the wrist of a man who is lying in front of an altar. This man is lying on his back as if dead and thus being raised to a new life by the lion.

Second — The foot should ever advance in the course of the day, whatever our duties may be. Such duty may apply to ourselves, in developing what is good and in restraining what is bad. It may also apply to our family, our workplace, our Lodge, our religion, or our society. Taking that step initiates action.

Third — The knee should be receptive to the prayers of the distressed. A belief in God must be supported by a belief in the power of prayer. Praying for a fellow Brother in distress should follow up other assistance already committed. In cases where nothing but prayer remains, pray for God's guidance, support, comfort and relief.

Fourth — A faithful breast conceals the faults and the secrets of a Brother as well as the secrets of Freemasonry. This principle of morality requires that we do unto others as we would have others do unto us. In this manner we maintain the respect for a Brother by his Brethren and also display charity to that Brother.

Fifth — Approaching evil maybe averted by a friendly warning. If such truth is painful then extra care must be exercised in kind and tender communication as an expression of brotherly love. Meekness, gentleness and the right timing are critical if a brother is to appreciate our concerns. We who are willing to so warn must also be receptive to such help from others.

So the loss of Hiram, whose name in Hebrew can mean guru, a teacher of divine light and wisdom, is not the physical loss of King Solomon's principal architect. It is the loss of knowledge, that light and wisdom that enables us to regulate our chequered existence. It is the loss of the ability to build our personal perfect Temple of Humanity. We may draw a parallel with the three Fellowcraft Lodges who went out searching. One found nothing despite its efforts. One brought the criminals to justice. One had to be content with providing the substitute secrets. This of course does not mean we should give up hope, for with faith we can apply the substituted secrets, which may enable us to regain that which was lost.

Throughout our Masonic career we seek the light, the associated knowledge and the truth. The search for the 'Word' is a continuing process, not to be completed in this world. Hence we receive the substituted Word', thus reminding us that we have yet to attain true perfection, Prior to 1700 the secret word was one word only, as has been retained in most American rituals. The pronunciation remains a difficulty to this day, as international visitors will testify. The dual pronunciation we use today is probably a compromise adopted in 1809 by the Lodge of Promulgation in England to satisfy both the Moderns and the Antients and therefore represents two separate words.

Before leaving the Hiram legend we are reminded that according to Egyptian mythology, when Isis eventually found the body of Osiris, the coffin was encased in an acacia tree, from which the King of Byblos had made a column. Isis was able to acquire this column and break it to release the body of Osiris. Hence in some Masonic constitutions today, the broken column is used on the widow's pin. The surround of acacia leaves refers to the custom of placing a sprig of evergreen on the grave as a belief in immortality. In ancient Israel planting a sprig at the head of a grave marked its location, as treading on a grave was regarded as an act of extreme bad luck..

Investing the Apron

The Master Mason's apron has blue edging, which is usually the sky blue of Craft Masonry, although most Scottish Lodges use aprons with dark blue edging. As a mark of rank it has three rosettes in the form of a

triangle and also two sets of tassels with seven chains. Researchers have struggled to justify the use of the tassels but they could represent the frayed ends of the apron strings used by the Operative Masons, which they tied at the front, the seven making it perfect.

Initially the apron design was at the whim of the individual Speculative Mason. The design became more and more elaborate, reflecting the wealth of the wearer. The design included gold embroidery, ribbons and fringes, which were attached to leather, silk or linen. When the design was standardised in England in 1814:

- the three rosettes formed a triangle representing a union between spirit, soul and matter.
- the two ribbons represented the two pillars.
- the seven chains on each tassel ribbon were comprised of four representing matter and three representing the spirit.
- the fourteen chains may have related to the fourteen pieces, into which the body of Osiris was cut by Set, in Egyptian mythology.
- the clasp was a serpent, symbolical of the wisdom that now encircles us.

Traditional History

The ornaments are the porch, dormer and tessellated pavement. The porch is the entrance to the sanctuary, the sanctuary of the Holy of Holies. Thus we would prepare our hearts by an acceptance of the VSL, to prepare the body for entrance to that most Holy Place in heaven. The dormer allows the holy light of heaven to shine into our hearts in order to convey wisdom and goodness. The tessellated or squared pavement reminds us to square our hearts and minds by a study of the VSL to avoid the evil of darkness.

The coffin is an emblem of death even though at one stage the Jews buried their dead in shrouds and winding cloths. Osiris was placed in a coffin. Noah's Ark could be thought of as a sort of coffin, carrying from one life to another and better life. A number of other ancient religions also adopted the use of a coffin-like ark or boat to transport the dead to the next world. Today it remains an emblem of sorrow to all those associated with it. The skull and crossbones, as emblems of mortality, remind us of the shortness of life and that there is no escape from death, irrespective of our station in life,

Working Tools

The tools of this degree, which are the skirret, pencil and compasses are tools of planning, by which the Master Mason supervises the preparation and construction by the Entered Apprentice and Fellowcraft.

The skirret refers to that straight and undeviating line of conduct, an equivalent of the straight and narrow, a path that is difficult to maintain due to the pressures to accept an easier path. Small deviations encourage larger deviations until we are lost in a maze, and even our dealings with God become confused.

The pencil details the design, the path we are to follow to reach the light, the path by which we will be judged. That light of knowledge will dispel ignorance and make darkness visible. It also records our words, thoughts and actions in the past, present and future.

The compasses remind us to keep our desires and passions within due bounds, such bounds being defined by the finitely adjustable limits of the compasses. As we gain knowledge and confidence, so the circle is extended to reflect the measure of our life and conduct, both to ourselves and to others.

Each involves the centre. The skirret and the compasses act on the centre, the pencil marks the centre. The centre is here the genuine secrets are to be found. In 1814 the trowel was discarded as one of the working tools. As a working tool of the Operative Mason in the process of construction, it would appear as belonging more appropriately to the Second Degree. In the speculative sense it was used to spread goodwill and brotherly love among fellow Brethren.

Charge After Raising

This final charge, usually by the SW, is largely self-explanatory and can be summed up by the exhortation to the Speculative Master Mason, now armed with the planning and supervisory Working Tools of that degree, that he affords assistance and instruction to his Brethren in the inferior degrees.

'you are henceforth authorised to correct the errors and irregularities of Brethren and Fellows and guard them against a breach of fidelity.'

One part however is not explained. That is, what the Ancient Landmarks of the Order are, and also how many. This subject has been debated extensively by many noted Masonic historians and would require at least another paper, if not an entire book, to discuss fully, as even now there is no general consensus of opinion.

Summary

The Third Degree completes your formal entry into Freemasonry. There is so much you can do. There is so much you can learn. By practising out of the Lodge that which you have been taught in it, you will become more highly respected in your home, your workplace and your community. Further study is recommended and a good starting point is the Ritual Book and the Book of Constitutions. Then the Lodge of Research library and hopefully membership of the WHJ Mayers Lodge of Research! Masonry is a progressive science and perfection comes with time, patience, study and understanding.

Above all, Masonry has to be fun or you will lose interest. So enjoy its ritual, its ceremonial, its symbolism, its teachings and its companionship and read wisely so that you may learn quickly to practise the teachings of Freemasonry.

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The above paper was delivered by the Wor. Preceptor Wor. Bro. Lynd at the March meeting of the Lodge.