

At the building of King Solomon's Temple, and before the institution of the degree of M.M. and P.M., there were 80,000 operatives employed, part of which were hewers in the Quarries at Zaradatha, and part builders of the Temple; besides these 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 officers, every portion of the work be subject to the nicest ~~inspection~~ scrutiny, and each F.C. receive with punctuality the reward of his industry and skill, this immense number was divided into 1100 Lodges of F.C. and E.A., the latter under the superintendence of the former, who taught them the work; and over the whole presided 3,300 Menatschim, Overseers, or Mark Masters, three over each Lodge. These are now usually called W.M. and S. and J.W.

Each F.C. had a mark peculiar to himself by which his work was known to his immediate Overseer. On the other hand, the Overseers had one mark in common, with which they stamped the approval of a F.C.'s work. They had also other marks by which they noted the juxta-position of any two stones. Thus, without any difficulty, was each individual's work known and recognised as perfect, and its proper place indicated. The Master's Mark was the triangle and refers to God, the Grand Geometrician, and Great Overseer of the Universe, to whom we must all submit, and ought most humbly to adore.

These 3,300 Overseers were again subdivided into 100 Lodges, with 33 in each, over whom presided 300 Overseers, also called Menatschim or Mark Masters. They were appointed by Hiram Abiff himself and on them devolved the responsibility of paying

the others their wages.

When the F.Cs. and their Overseers or Mark Masters went to receive their wages, they put their hands in a different manner, and at a different wicket, so that if a F.C. presumed to put his hand in at a Mark Master's wicket he was immediately detected as an imposter, and the J.W. stood ready at the S.W.'s side with the axe to inflict the prescribed punishment. This constitutes part of the penal sign of a Mark Mason, and as well as the other part, that ofwas an ancient punishment among the Sidonians.

It was the duty of the Overseers to examine each stone, not only as to its soundness, by giving three blows upon it with a maul, and as to its finish, by turning it over. but also ~~to~~ as to its being made in exact accord with the working plans previous to its being passed to the F.C., whose duty it was to see that it fulfilled these requirements.

If found perfect in every way, it received the Mark Master's Mark and was sent to the Temple, but if not, it was rejected. This was effected by two or more F.Cs. taking it between them (thus), and after swaying it backwards and forwards three times, it was heaved over among the rubbish, a circumstance from which is derived one of the signs called the heaving over sign.

The other signs, namely the dis sign 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 K.S.T. Once in every six working days it was the custom of the Mark Masters to wait on the acting Grand Master H.A. to receive the working plans, as well as the instructions for

carrying on the work. Part of one of these working plans appears to have been lost, but an ingenious and intelligent F.C., either having seen the perfect plan or forming a good idea of it from the nature of the work, perceived that a stone of very peculiar ~~design~~ 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 and put his mark upon it. When the working plans were examined, no place was found for this particular stone, and the F.C. received instead of honour, only angry words and reproaches for idling away his time. The stone was ordered to be thrown aside, and this was accordingly ~~done~~ effected by two F.Cs. well pleased with the humiliation of their companion's vanity.

The sorrowful F.C. on seeing ~~that~~ the unworthy treatment of his work, placed his hand to his cheek and resting his head upon it in a disconsolate manner, exclaimed; Alas; Alas! my labour is lost. This is the third sign of the degree and called the Dis. sign.

The stone long lay hid among the rubbish. At length, however, the time drew near when the Keystone for the Sacred Arch of K.S.T., to which the portion of the working plan before alluded to referred, was required. Search was made at the Temple, but no such stone could be found, and on further examination it was discovered that no stone of the requisite form and construction had ever been brought there.

The Overseer of that portion of the building immediately sent to the Overseer at the Quarries, who, he supposed, 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 amongst those entrusted to his care. The work was at a standstill, and the reason was demanded by and explained to H.A. who not only recollected drawing the plan and giving the orders for the particular stone, but also giving them himself to the Mark Master; the latter was reprimanded for his carelessness in losing any portion of his plan, and on learning the nature of the stone, it occurred to his recollection that one of a similar description had been cut by one of his workmen. He at once informed H.A. thereof and adding that, not finding it on his working plan, he had refused to mark it, and had caused it to be rejected. H.A. sent forthwith for the F.C. who had cut the stone, and from his replies found that this must be the very stone required. Instant and careful search was ordered to be made for it at the Quarry, and it was at last found uninjured.

To evince his approbation of the skill and ability displayed by the ingenious F.C., H.A. directed that he should be forthwith advanced to the honourable degree of Mark Master, and ordered him to cut the Mark Master's Mark of approval on the stone around his own, and outside of it eight letters, with respect to which there is some ambiguity from the tradition not having been retained in the original language, but they are usually considered to represent H.T.W.S.S.T.K.S.

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 together after the manner described as the fourth sign of the degree, and looking upwards, exclaimed, Thanks be to God, I have marked well.

Copyright Worcestershire Masonic
Library and Museum Trust