

A SHORT EXPLANATION OF THE FIRST DEGREE.

The Can. on arriving at the ante room is introduced to the Tyler, who requests him to sign a declaration that he is "free and of the full age of 21 years". The expression "free" is probably a survival of the time when men were either serfs or free men, but to-day it implies that the Can. is free of any prior obligation which might affect his membership of the Order, and free of any mercenary or other unworthy motive in seeking to become a member. Full age implies full legal responsibility, but in the case of a Lewis (i.e. the son of a mason) the privilege <sup>of admission</sup> is sometimes granted at the age of 18.

The preparation which follows is very important. It is suggested that originally the C. was B--- H---, and even to-day in America C's are left only in the S. Ch. In this country, however, only the essential p--- are made B---. The R.A., L.B. and L.K. are made B. and the R.H. is S.C. to indicate that in this degree the passive and creative side of man's nature is to be dedicated to the service of F.O.A.M. The L.K. so that in accordance with ancient custom it may be in contact with the earth whilst taking the O.; and L.B. in order that the F.L. may be applied. It may also serve to prevent a woman from obtaining admission. The S.S. is a survival of the custom observed among the Israelites when about to tread on holy ground, a custom observed among Mahomedans to this day. The C.T. is the sign of Death and its purpose is explained in the ceremony, likewise the significance of the O.I. The N.W. is always found in every initiatory rite, and it serves to remind us that in the physical world we came out of D. into L., so in the intellectual and finally in the spiritual world. The material reason is to ensure that should the C. decline to proceed with the ceremony, he could be conducted from the L. without having obtained any information as to its form.

The deprivation of M. and H. is also important, apart from the explanation given in the ceremony. In ancient days metals



were considered as the gift of the Thonic Gods, and, as they came from below, were considered evil by nature. This has been considered as the reason why no metallic tools were used in the erection of King Solomon's Temple. The deprivation signifies that worldly possessions which hinder spiritual progress, have been left behind. There is also the practical reason that nothing offensive or defensive shall be brought into the L.

Admission is gained by the T. giving three S. at regular intervals which may be interpreted in the words of the ancient exhortation "Seek and ye shall find, ask and ye shall have and knock and it shall be opened unto you". There is also the mystic interpretation that the regular intervals indicate that the body, soul and spirit are in equal relation, the one to the other.

In the perambulation the C. follows the path of the sun, as in all ancient religious rites, stepping off with the L.F.F. symbolically trampling with the L.H. <sup>the</sup> serpent of evil. This custom is still observed in Africa and India.

Thus we may consider that the World is represented by the C.T. and H.W. which the Brotherhood helps us to free ourselves from. The Flesh is represented by the F.A.C. in which we trample on it with the Tau Cross, while the Devil is represented by the snake, of whose existence we are reminded by the warning to step off with the L.F.F.

The C. is announced to the J.W. and S.W., who represent the pillars B. and J., and is bidden to enter F. and of G.R.

The questions which follow are the final test before being permitted to advance to the Ped., take the O. and receive the L. In making the three S. in due form the C. makes with his feet three S., which with the fourth (resting on the V.S.L.) <sup>symbolise the four</sup> ~~form the initial~~ letters of the Hebrew words <sup>Jod He Vav He</sup> ~~meaning~~ (Jehovah) <sup>of God the Creator.</sup> These three S. are again made by the C. in the position taken up whilst taking the O., the fourth S. being in the same position as before.

In the O. the word "hale" should be pronounced "heal" and not "hale". The meaning of the word is to cover over, and is still so used in the phrase "to hale a cottage". It is also to be



associated with heal - to cover up or close a wound - the meaning therefore is tautological, namely, to cover up the word (the Masonic S - t). The use of the pronunciation "hale" is misleading and apt to cause a newly initiated Brother to think he has something to hail or proclaim aloud.

Another point which occasions much mystification is the prohibition against writing, as it appears obvious that every printed ritual is a breach of this clause. The strict observance of this undertaking is the reason why we cannot expect to find any copies of mediæval rituals. From a practical point of view the essential object to-day is to prevent anyone who has not been regularly initiated from entering our lodges, and the printed ritual usually does this, for s - w - and g are missing, and a careful questioning would undoubtedly lead to the discovery of an impostor.

In the altered conditions of the present time our secrecy is more of the nature of privacy.

Then comes the penalty the first clause of which, in Taylor's ritual, sounds somewhat melodramatic in these days. In the Scottish ritual, however, it reads "under the no less penalty which in former days was that of ----- "or the no less effective punishment to-day that that of" etc.

The reference to the representation of the three lesser lights which follows is clearly derived from the old Egyptian Mysteries of Isis, Osiris and Horus, but this interpretation appears to have little or no significance in the ceremony to-day. In reality they represent the W.M. the J.W. and the S.W., and these officers have a real symbolic meaning of great importance, which symbolic characters they maintain consistently throughout all the Degrees.

The W.M. represents the rising sun, and in this sense covers two distinct meanings; the first in connection with the nature of God, and the other with regard to the nature of man. A similar dual character exists in the case of the S.W. and J.W.

The S.W. represents God the Creator - He who created the world out of chaos. It is the Master who opens the Lodge, who calls

it out of nothing. He sits in the East, the place of light. In the nature of man the W.M. represents the Spirit, the Divine Spark, ever striving for light.

The S.W. represents the Setting Sun, and therefore the destructive or transformative aspects of the Deity, who shall one day close the Grand Lodge of this World when time shall be swallowed up into Eternity. The S.W. closes the Lodge, and, as the Destroyer, reminds us that death, the great leveller, will bring all men low - his symbol is therefore the Level. In the nature of man he represents the Soul, which alone enables the spirit to raise the body towards divine things.

The J.W. represents the Sun at its meridian and stands for the Way of Life, the balance between birth and death. In the divine aspect he represents the Preserver; in the nature of man he stands for the body, which perishes.

Finally it should be noted that in every degree these three officers co-operate to vivify the C., and so it is in the spiritual life, for the body, soul and spirit must co-operate if real progress is to be attained.

Before receiving the S---s the C. must take the P.R.S. which proves to be the Tau Cross, symbolizing our natural and animal passions. The P.R.S. therefore indicates that we must trample these passions under foot and bring them under control if we are to make any advancement in Py.

The remainder of the ceremony is virtually self explanatory, but a more detailed description will be found in "The E.A.'s Handbook" by J.S.M. Ward, from which most of the foregoing data has been extracted.