

A SHORT EXPLANATION OF THE THIRD DEGREE.

The Third Degree in Freemasonry is termed the Sublime Degree, and the title is truly justified.

Even the average man, who enters the Craft with little realisation of its antiquity and elaborate symbolism, cannot fail to be impressed with the solemnity of this, its greatest degree.

Here at length we learn the true purpose of Freemasonry. It is not merely a system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols, but a great adventure, a search after that which is lost.

The questions which the C. has to answer before retiring from the L. are generally well enough understood, but there are one or two points which invite explanation.

The reply that the G. is the fourth part of a circle has an important meaning. In ancient days the circle was always regarded as the symbol of God the Infinite whose name in Hebrew we discovered in the <sup>initiation</sup> previous ceremony to consist of four letters; thus the C. was admitted <sup>in the second degree</sup> on one letter of the Mystic Name.

The "wages" we receive consist of the power to comprehend the nature of God. The P.C. receives his wages without scruple or diffidence because the spiritual benefit he receives from Freemasonry is in exact proportion to his desire, ability and endeavour to comprehend its inner meaning. His "employers" are the Divine Trinity of whom wisdom, truth and justice are the outstanding attributes.

The separate and conjoint significations of the pillars B. and J. are here to be interpreted as meaning that the C., being fortified by every moral virtue, is now properly prepared to undergo the last and greatest trial to fit him to become a M.M. (i.e. "In S--- he is E---").

The P.W. is of the greatest significance when combined with that leading from the First to the Second Degree. The first P.W. S--- implies that the C. finds the simple necessities of life, such as C. and W. sufficient for his requirements, and they are considered so by the spiritually minded man. The second P.W.



T--- C--- conveys the warning that W.P. in themselves bring death to the soul or impede its upward progress. Hence the statement of Christ that it is hard for the rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

In the preparation the B--- of B.A., S.B. and D.K. indicates that the C. is now about to consecrate both sides of his nature, active and passive, creative and preservative, to the service of T.M.H.

The change of K's indicates that the Spirit and Soul are in unison, and that the body is of little importance.

In the opening ceremony the point within the circle refers to the source of all knowledge, the centre of the Infinite or God, also the inner conscience of man, for by obedience to both we cannot err.

The journey from E. to W. represents the course of human life from birth to death, or from the light of the East to the setting sun of the West; the end of the quest is the reunion with T.M.H.

That which is lost is the true understanding of the essence of T.M.H., which we can only achieve by D. Thus we perceive that the dramatic illustration as to how the G.S. were lost, is really to emphasise that D. is a necessary preliminary to their recovery.

It is not correct to say that the search indicated in the opening ceremony is suddenly abandoned, and those who think this misinterpret the whole meaning of the legend. In the H.R.A. we find an excellent answer in allegorical and symbolical language, whilst the jewel of the degree emphasises what the end of the quest is.

The promise of the W.M. to help in the search means that He whom he represents will help those who earnestly strive to act in accordance with the rules laid down in the V.S.L.

The C. having received the blessing then starts on three symbolical journeys. First he satisfies the J.W. that he is an E.A., P. and of G.S. He next satisfies the S.W. that he is a F.C. and has benefitted by the study of the L.A. and S. and then finally he returns to the S.W. to give the P.W. to show that in S. he is S. ready for the final trial.

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In taking the S---S to the E. it will be observed that the first three are in the form of a cross; it can also be said they allude to the N.S. and E. entrances by which H.A. attempted to escape. The four remaining represent the four elements of matter, air, earth, fire and water, by all of which we are tested in this life.

The O. indicates that a M.M.L. must always be opened on the C., meaning the secret chamber of the heart and indicating that all that happens thereafter is a spiritual experience.

The remainder of the ceremony is virtually self explanatory, but it is interesting to note that the M.M.G. is apparently of great antiquity and world wide recognition. It is known and used in the Dervish Rite, among West African Negroes, among the Red Indians of Central America, and was apparently known to the ancient Druids for it has been found carved on a stone at Stonehenge. In the Egyptian Mysteries the body of Osiris was apparently raised by Anubis in precisely the same way as the M.M., and in the rites of Athra it also appears to have been used on a similar occasion. Thus it will be seen to be truly an ancient landmark and one to be most carefully guarded.

Further explanations will be found in "The M.M.'s Book" by J.S.M. Ward, from which the foregoing remarks have been extracted.

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