

Mason's Confession.

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Some time ago a mason living at a considerable distance from me, whom I knew to have the character of a sensible and religious man, sent me a long paper, all of his own hand)writing and subscribed by him; in which he makes a confession of the oath, word, and other secrets of his craft. When he wrote that paper, and for a good time before, he was confined by bodily distress: and he represents his having been brought under a conviction of that whole affair, as a mystery of iniquity. His narrative is intermixed with reasonings from many texts of scripture, and otherwise, about the iniquity of the matter. He considers the oath as profane and abominable, what was sinful for him to take, and sinful to keep; he treats of all the secrets which are therein sworn to, as a compound of superstition, ceremonies, lyes, and idle nonsense; and he renounces the whole as a horrid wickedness. At the same time, he urges me to publish the paper, for the conviction of persons engaged in that oath, and for warning others to beware of that snare; allowing me to discover his name, his place of abode, and the lodge he belonged to. However I have only drawn out his narrative, which I here offer you, in his own words, for a place in your Magazine; leaving the world to judge of the matter as they please.

He informs me, that the account he gives is only of what he himself was taught, according to the usage of the lodge in which he entered; without regard to some circumstantial variations which may take place in other lodges, while they agree in the substance. And indeed an absolute uniformity among them cannot be supposed, if, according to what follows, the whole affair must be committed only to their memories, and share in the common fate of oral traditions.

A mason's confession of the oath, word, and other secrets of his craft.

These are to testify, concerning that oath, word, and other secrets, held among the corporation of masons; wherein I was taken under the same, by sundry of them gathered together and met at D-----, about the year 1727.

Concerning the oath.

After one comes in at the door, he that keeps the door, called the warden, looses the garter of his right-leg stocking, rools down the stocking, folds up the knee of the breeches, and requires him to deliver up any metal thing he has upon him. He is made to kneel on the right knee, bare; then the square is put three times round his body and applied to his breast, the open compasses pointing to his breast, and his bare elbow on the Bible with his hand lifted up; and he swears, "As I shall answer before God at the great day and this company, I shall heal and conceal, or not divulge or make known the secrets of the mason-word, (Here one is taken bound, not to write them on paper, parchment, timber, stone, sand, snow, etc) under the pain of having my tongue taken out from beneath my chowks, and my heart out from beneath my left oxter, and my body buried within the sea-mark, where it ebbs and flows twice in the tewnty four hours."

Immediately after that oath, the administrator of it says, "You sat down a cowan, I take you up a mason".-----When I was taken under that oath, I knew not what these secrets were which I was not to divulge, having had no information before me. One person in the Lodge instrcted me a little about their secrets the same dat that I entered, and was called my author; and another person in the lodge, whom I then chused to be my instructor till that time twelve-month, was called my intender.----- There is a yearly imposing of that oath in admissions among the said craft through the land on St. John's day, as it is termed, being the 27th of December.

Concerning the word.

a mason sworn, and a mason by trade.

- Q. Where keep you the key of your lodge ? A. Between my tongue and my teeth, and under a lap of my liver, where all the secrets of my heart lie; for if I tell anything in the lodge, my tongue is to be taken out from beneath my chowks and my heart out from beneath my left oxter, and my body to be buried within the sea mark, where it ebbs and flows twice in the twenty four hours .
- Q. Whats the key of your lodge ? A. A well hung tongue.
- Q. Are you a Mason ? A. Yes. Q. How shall I know that ? A. By signs, tokens, and points of my entrie. Master. Shew me one of these. Prentice. Shew you me the first, and I'll shew you the second .----- So the master gives him the sign, with the right hand up the left side. P. More clear .-----Then the master gives it uppermore, or moves his right hand a little farther up the left side.----P. Heal and conceal. ---- N.B. The token or grip is, by laying the ball of the thumb of the right hand upon the first or uppermost ~~joint~~ knuckle of the second finger from the thumb of the other's right hand.
- Q. How many points are there in the word? A. Five. Q. What are these five? A. The word is one, the sign is two, the grip is three, the penalty is four, and Heal and conceal is five .
- Q? Where was you entered ? A. In a just and perfect lodge.
- Q. What makes a just and perfect lodge? A. Five fellow crafts and seven entered prentices.---- N.B. They do not restrict themselves to this number, but will do the thing with fewer.
- Q. Where should the mason word be given? A. On the top of a mountain, from the crow of a cock, the bark of a dog, or the turtle of a dove.
- Q. How many points are there in the square ? A. Five.
- Q. What are these five? A. The square, our master under God is one; the level's two, the plumb-rule's three, the hand-rule's four, and the gage is five.

The day that a prentice comes under the oath, he gets his choice of a mark to be put upon his tools, by which to discern them . So I laid choose this . (The figure is is the M.S.) which cost me one mark Scots . Hereby one is taught to say to such as ask the question, Where got you this mark,? A. I laid down one and took up another.

If one should come to a mason working at a stone, and say, "That stone lies boss," the prentice is taught to answer " It is not so boss but it may be filled up again," or " It is not so boss as your head would be if your horns were out."

- Q. When doth a mason wear his flowers? A. Between Martinmas and Yule.
- Q. What's a masons livery ? A. A yellow cap and blue breeches meaning the compasses.
- Q. How many jewels are there in your lodge ? A. Three.
- Q. What are those three? A. A square pavement a dinted ashler, and a broached dornal.
- Q. Whats the square pavement for ? A? For the master mason to draw his ground-draughts on.
- Q. What's the dinted ashler for ? A. To adjust the square and to make the gages by.
- Q. What's the brozched dornal for ? A. For me the younger and last entered prentice, to learn to broach upon.
- Q. How high should a mason's siege be ? A. Two steeples, a back and a cover, knee-high altogether.---- N.B. One is taught that the cowan's siege is built up of whin stones, that it may soon tumble down again ; and it stands half out half in the lodge, that his neck may be under the drop in rainy weather, to come in at his shoulders and come out at his shoes.

- Q. Where lies the cappel-tow ? . A. Eighteen or nineteen feet and a half from the lodge door; and at the end of it lies the cavel-mell, to dress the stones with ----N.B. There is no such thing among them as a cappel-tow.
- Q. Where place ye your lodge ? . A. On the sunnt side of a hill, that the sun may ascend on't when it rises.... N.B. A lodge is a place where masons assemble and work. Hence that assembly or society of masons is called a lodge.
- Q. How stands your lodge ? . A. East and west, as kirks and chapels did of old.
- Q. Why so ? . A. Because they were holy and so we ought to be.
- Q. How many lights are there in your lodge ? . A. Three.
- Q. What are these three. ? . A. The south east , south and south west.
- Q. How many levels are there in your lodge ? . A. Three.
- Q. What are these three ? . A. The sun and the sea, and the level. N.B. I can give no reason why the sun and the sea are called two of their levels , but so they will have it. To be particular in showing how the master mason stands at the south east corner of the lodge, and the fellow crafts next to him , and next to them the wardens, and next the entered prentices , and how their sieges stand distant one from another , and the tools they work with is not worth while.
- Q. Where lay you the key of your lodge ? . A. Two feet and a half from the lodge door , beneath a green divet.---- N.B. This is meant of their oath , under which the secrets of their lodge are hid from the drop; that is, from the un-entered prentice , or any others out of their society , whom they call drops.
- Q. How long should a prentice wear his shirt ? . A. Till there be nine knots on it, three up the back, and three down each arm.

There are likewise various other signs, which they distinguish or discern themselves by . As, if one were in a company and to send for another mason , he does it by sending a piece of paper , with a square point folded in, ~~a square~~, at the corner, and suppose he squeeze it all in his hand , when it is opened out, the mark where the square point was folded in , is the thing that's noticed . Or , if he stands his glove , then the square is put on the first knuckle of the second finger , with the thumb nail or some other thing.

To find another by drinking , one say's, " Drink ". The other answers " No ". He saith the second time " Drink." The other answers " After you is good manners." Again he saith , " Drink , I warrant you ". And then he takes it.

Coming to a house where masons my be, he is to knock three knocks on the door ; a lesser, a more , and a more. One gives the sign with the right hand up the left side; or if riding, he is to strike the horse over the left shoulder . If in a land where their language is not known , he is to kneel with one knee, holdaing up his hand before the masons.

If one coming into a company , wants to know whether there be a mason in the same ; as he comes in , he makes himself to stumble and says, "the day's for seeing , and the night's for hearing; God be thanked we have all our formal mercies . There is no difference between a dun cow and a dun hummle cow".

~~A mason's horse is found out among others by the left foot stirrup being laid up.~~

~~To know if one or more masons be in a company~~
Then if a mason be in that company , he says, " What says the fellow fellow." . He answers , " I say nothing but what I may say again; there is no difference between a dun cow and a hummle cow."

~~A masons horse is found out among others by the left foot stirrup being laid up.~~

To know if one or more masons be in a company which one meets on the way , he says, " Who walks?." Then, if one be there , he says " A man walks." if more be there , the answer is , "Men walk." Then says he, " Good men and masters met you be; God bless all your company." Or, he gives the sign, by the right hand above the breath, which is called the fellow-crafts due guard; and the

grip, by clasping his fingers at the wrist, next at the elbow; not placing himself hand to hand, foot to foot, knee to knee, heart to heart, ear to ear, says, "Great you, great you, God greateth you, and make you a good master-mason; I'm a young man, going to push my fortune; if you can furnish me, you will do well."

I shall now give an account of what they call the Monday's lesson. ---- When the prentice comes to his Master's kitchen door, he is to knock three knocks; a lesser, a more, and a more. If none answers he is to lift the sneck, and go in, and wash the dishes and sweep the house. Q. How far is the prentice to carry off the ashes? A. As far off until he see the smoke come out of the chimney head. After that he goes to his master's chamber door, and knocks three knocks, a lesser, a more, and a more; and says "Master are you waking?. If he answer, "Not so sound but I may be awakened," then he goes in. His master asks him, "What'n a morning is it?" He answers, "Its a fair morning, the winds in the west, and the sun's in the east, past five, going to six." His master says, "Who told you that?" The prentice answers he "met with a hathern man." "A." (says his master), sorrow is ay soon up at morn."

Q. How dothe the prentice give his master his shirt?
A. He gives it with the left sleeve foremost, and the neck of it next him, with the breast of it upmost, in readiness to put on. In like manner he gives him the rest of his cloths. After that he gives him water to wash himself; then he offers him a cloth to dry himself; he will not have that; he offers him his shirt tail; he will not have that; then he bids him do his next best. After that he follows his master up street, down street, with his right foot at his master's leftsward point, within stroke of a nine inch gage, till he comes within sixteen feet and a half of the lodge door; there the prentice leaves him. Then he goes to sort up the lodge, and put the things in order; after which he calls in them men to work.

And this is the amount of that invented matter; or all that I can remember that is material in it.

P.S. There was printed, in the year 1747, (ix.404.) a protestation and declination from the society of operative masons in the lodge at Torphichen, to meet at Livingston Kirk, Dec. 27 1739; subscribed of that date, at Kirknewton, by James Chrystie; and with another subscribed adherence, at Dalkeith, July 27. 1747, by John Miller..

in that paper, they renounce the mason oath, both as to its matter and forms finding the same sinful and unlawful and therefore not binding on their consciences." They declare, that it is imposed and administered "with such rites, ceremonies, and circumstances, as are in themselves sinful and unchristian, unarrantable, and a symbolising with idolaters; such as kneeling on their bare knee, and the naked arm upon the Bible; ----" That it is and must to every intrant be sworn rashly; without allowing a copy of the said oath, and time duly and deliberately to consider the lawfulness of it; the matter thereof, and things sworn to therein, never being under their serious consideration previous to the swearing of that oath; seeing the person swearing knows not what he is swearing to; ---- That they "do look upon it as an unlawful obligation to conceal the dreadful wickedness, superstition, idolatry, blasphemy, and profanation of the name and ordinance of God, which is contained in and annexed to that oath, altogether unbecoming the name and profession of Christians; by the which unlawful means of secrecy, many are rashly and inconsiderately precipitated and slyly drawn into that sinful confederacy and wickedness above said, ere ever they can be aware of it:" ---- That "it is appending the seal of a solemn oath, containing horrid horrid dreadful and uncommon imprecations, to a blank, yea to worse, to ridiculous nonsense and superstition; nonsense, (and that with this aggravation, of prophaning the sacred scriptures, by intermixing them therewith.) only fit for the amusement of children in a winter evening; most of these secrets

being idle stuff or lyes, and other parts of it superstitious, only becoming Heathens and idolaters."----- Moreover they declare that the secrecy is broken and disclosed, by " what is already published to the world in print ; concerning which (say they) there have been many lies and equivocations, in denying the same, though they contain the substance of the mystery."---
I am etc.

D.B.

(N.B. With his letter, above inserted, Mr D.B. sent us the paper he mentioned (I32), which is dated Nov 15th 1751, and another, of the same handwriting and subscription, dated Feb. 20 1752, also a paper containing several queries which he sent to the mason, for explaining some things in his papers, and the mason's answers . Having compared the precedeing narrative with these papers, we find that it is faithfully taken from them : so that whatever shall be thought of the mason's conduct , which it does not become us either to justify or condemn, the authenticity of the narrative may be depended upon.)

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