

PRIVATE.



THE LODGE OF LIVING STONES,  
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PILLARS, STEPS, and SIGNS.

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## PILLARS, STEPS, and SIGNS.

### Preliminary.

Apart from its purposes of Brotherhood and philanthropic Relief, the Craft contemplates the search for Truth as one of its foundation principles. It claims to be, and is, a progressive science of hidden truths of Nature, and therefore of hidden truths about ourselves in whom Nature is epitomised and summed up.

This scientific or philosophic side of Craft-teaching has unfortunately long been ignored by the majority of our Lodges; it has been crowded out by the excessive attention paid to social and other matters. But to-day an increasing number of Brethren is manifesting a healthy discontent at methods that have satisfied a former generation and is clamouring for instruction in the science of Initiation. So in this Paper we will approach Masonry from its scientific side, and deal, though in a quite elementary way, with a few of its chief and most familiar symbols, the deep and surprising instructiveness of which is not disclosed in the official teaching—the Pillars, the Steps, and the Signs. These are symbols to which every Brother is introduced at the outset of his Masonic career. He is purposely told but little about them; only sufficient is said to arrest his attention and set him off thinking and searching for himself, till their true value becomes revealed to him as the fruit of his own exertion. Unfortunately most Masons conclude that the official instruction exhausts the meaning of the symbols and they go no farther. But the official instruction is intentionally meagre and superficial; it is merely a shell, but it hides valuable kernels within. If we content ourselves with the shell, and with the schoolboy practice of merely memorising and repeating the letter of the Ritual and Lectures, we shall know next to nothing of actual Masonic doctrine. There is imposed upon us the labour of seeking for what lies within the shell, if we are to become something more than nominal Initiates; our own worthiness to possess what the shell contains is made dependent upon our personal effort to open that shell.

It is sometimes asked, Why use symbols at all? Why cannot Masonic doctrine be imparted in simple, clear, verbal statement? The answer is that Masonic science is by no means a simple subject, but one, like every other branch of scientific knowledge, to be acquired only by patient effort and persevering thought. Nor can something which is addressed to and intended to awaken the imagination of a man to its depths be exhausted in a few words. It is a science best taught by symbols for many reasons: (1) a true symbol is a compendium of many ideas in one and expresses much more than words can do; (2) Symbols are meant to endure for all

time. Like music, symbolism is a universal speech reaching minds of whatever race, speech or creed; whereas language differs; the meaning of words changes from time to time and often has a different value for different people; (3) Symbols, whilst revealing truth to those qualified to receive it, conceal it from those who are not; (4) and, lastly, the interpretation of symbols is a profitable mental exercise, a great stimulus to that reflective thought which is indispensable to true Masonic progress.

The science of which Masonry treats is the science of ourselves. The Craft purports to be in search of something in ourselves which has been lost, which we hope to find, which it is possible to find, and which it will help us to find by a certain method which itself describes as a "mystic science," a "royal art." It recommends, therefore, the knowledge of ourselves as the chief of all human studies, so that we may first comprehend in what respect we have sustained loss, then understand clearly what it is we hope to find, and finally set about to find it. "Know thyself!" was the maxim inscribed over ancient temples of Initiation, and consequently all our symbols are provided with the single purpose of instructing us in self-knowledge and so assisting us to the discovery of something of supreme value at present lost to us.

From this standpoint, then, of trying to understand ourselves, we will examine our Pillars, Steps, and Signs.

### THE PILLARS.

First look at the two Pillars. They stand at the threshold of every well-appointed Lodge, as they are said to have stood in or near to the entrance of King Solomon's Temple. (Their construction is Biblically described in I. Kings vii., 15—22, and II. Chron. iii. 15—17). They are obviously not ordinary architectural pillars; for they are not meant to support any weight or carry any superstructure. They are ornamental Columns, without any structural purpose or practical use from a builder's standpoint. Their value is a purely symbolic one; they are emblematic images, first, of certain metaphysical principles (as will be explained presently); secondly, of certain features of ourselves in whom those metaphysical principles are physically reflected and embodied.

Examine the Pillars; (a picture of them will be found in the frontispiece to Lodge Paper No. 7 on the Second Degree Tracing Board). They are both alike in form, save that one is (or should be) white and the other black,—a difference to be explained later. First, there is a square base (or sometimes a cubical pediment) resting on the ground. Second, out of this base rises a shaft or column like the trunk of a tree. Third, there is a capital or

chapter garnished with flowers and fruit, and surmounted by a circle or globe over which is thrown a veil or net-work.

In all this we are asked to see an image of ourselves, a representation of the personal constitution of each of us; so that the Pillars provide, at the very entrance of the Lodge, a first lesson in the knowledge and understanding of ourselves; which lesson is as follows:—

The square base (or cubical pediment) is a figure of our normal personality, the bodily man, sprung from and resting upon the earth, and meant to be shaped and disciplined out of an incoherent rough-shalar state into one represented by the true die or square and the perfect cube.

Within the earthly square base of our mortal person, however, dwells an energy or life-force which is not material, and which we call the soul. It is represented by the ascending shaft of the pillar. Like a tree-trunk springing from the soil in which it is rooted and from which it draws nourishment, so the human soul grows upwards out of the personal patch of Mother Earth forming the physical body, and is nourished and developed by its daily earthly experience, ever building something new into itself by daily activities of thought, conduct and aspiration. And as the sap or life-force of a tree ultimately breaks into leaf, flower and fruit, so here at the capital of the pillar, the energies of the soul are shewn as manifesting in analogous results,—the graces and fruits of the spirit,—and finally as shaping themselves into a circle, globe, or rounded whole.

The highest part of ourselves, our spiritual summit, is always invisible, beyond sight of the eye and ken of the mind; that is why, in the pillar, it is shewn covered with a veil or net-work. We see not what we build into ourselves from hour to hour, from day to day, but, as the pillar indicates, the essence of all our bodily activities is conserved within ourselves and comes to bloom and fruit in our superphysical part, shaping there our character and future. As we sow in the body at the foot of the pillar, we shall reap later in our spiritual nature at the top.

Note especially the contrast between the base of the pillar, which is a square or cube, and the summit, which is a circle or globe. The square is the traditional geometrical figure for what has physical form, and therefore it is here the symbol of the bodily man; whereas the circle or "nought" is the geometrical symbol of what is spiritual, formless and immeasurable. Even in old Chinese cosmogonies is found the maxim, "Heaven is round; earth is square." The veiled globe or circle at the top of the pillar, therefore, is the emblem of man's spiritual pole; it is the sphere into which the seeds or essence of his bodily activities are garnered

and come to fruit. These seeds are Biblically emblematised by the many-seeded pomegranate fruit with which the chapter is surrounded, while the globe itself is spoken of as the "golden bowl," the spiritual receptacle into which our sublimated life-activities are collected and conserved. The late poet-laureate describes this globe, or spiritual pole of man, in his recent great work, *The Testament of Beauty*, as:—

The full circle where the spirit of man,  
 escaping from the bondage of physical law,  
 re-entereth eternity.

In old geometrical metaphor the life-process was said to consist of squaring the circle and then reconverting the square into a circle, meaning that as the spiritual in us has become materialised, so our material element must be sublimated back into a spiritual condition. Human life begins on the earth and in the body, at the base of the pillar, as a rough ashlar; it needs to be shaped from the crude rough state into the perfect cube; and whilst this is in process our inner man is unconsciously growing upwards like the shaft of the pillar and building a spiritual superstructure represented by the globe at the top.

This is the first lesson taught by the Pillars. We come now to the next. There are two Pillars, one white, one black, corresponding with the chequered flooring of the Lodge, and one is associated with the left hand and the other with the right. The reason is a metaphysical one and proclaims that the ultimate substance or substrate of the Universe is a Unity which, in the manifested world, is observed by us as splitting up into a Duality—into such opposites as Spirit and Matter, Positive and Negative, Male and Female. Everything in Nature, including ourselves, has two sides, two aspects, a spiritual and a physical side, an active objective side and a passive subjective side, a good side and a bad one. Modern physics recognises that the visible world and everything in it is composed of positive and negative electrical forces in a state of balance. Nothing would or could exist without these two forces; it is their union and equilibrium that holds things together and makes them "stand firm." Humanity divides into two sexes with opposite characteristics and functions. The Nation polarises into two main political parties, one progressive, the other conservative, but each necessary and contributing to the weal of the whole. Electric light is the result of two currents of positive and negative energy conducted through separate wires until they meet and generate light by their union.

But this principle of dual forces in balance, only recently recognised by modern official science, has been known and acted upon by Initiates from the most ancient times, and the fact of it was proclaimed by two symbolic Pillars; one representing active,

positive, centrifugal energy, and called Boaz; the other representing passive, negative, centripetal force, and called Jachin. With us (following the marginal interpretation in the Bible) Boaz is defined as "Strength"; a modern and better word would be *Force*, primordial dynamic, electrical energy, of which lightning-fire is an example, and etymologically "Boaz" means fiery energy in a state of intense activity; whilst Jachin, which is explained by "To establish," really means passive or static force, *Inertia*, the resistance necessary to check the Boaz-force and establish it in objective concrete form and stability. Force and Resistance (in other words Spirit and Matter) are the twin pillars or basic positive and negative principles of which everything is constituted and into which everything, including ourselves, is polarised; hence we are provided with these symbolic Pillars in the Lodge, and every new Candidate is identified with them at the outset of his Masonic career. They are meant to tell him that on one side of him he is an immortal spiritual being with immeasurable potentialities, and on the other a material perishable creature of severe, limited capacity, and that he must learn that these two opposite poles of himself must be brought into harmony and balance.

Observe now another point. In the Lodge these two aspects of Force are further exemplified by the Pillars being exhibited in opposite positions on the Wardens' pedestals. One of them stands erect, whilst the other lies horizontally. As soon as the Lodge is declared open the S.W. represents the positive Boaz force and therefore erects his column vertically, while the J.W. represents the negative Jachin force and therefore lays his column down. On closing the Lodge the functions of the Wardens alter and so the position of the columns is at once reversed. Their polarity changes; the S.W. becomes the negative energy and lays his column down, whilst the J.W. becomes the positive energy and sets his pillar up.

No pillar at all stands on the W.M.'s pedestal. The reason is that the Master transcends the Wardens and combines their united forces in himself. Were the Pillars displayed on his pedestal, they would have to be displayed there in combination and balance, one upright and the other horizontal, thus forming a Cross; and the point where the two crosswise pillars intersect and find their balance is that Centre with which a Master is said to work and which we are all trying to find. As a matter of fact this Cross, though not shewn on the W.M.'s pedestal, is actually displayed in the Tau-cross shewn on the Apron with which he is invested on being installed as Master.

Let us apply all this to ourselves. Like the Pillars, we are beings with two opposite sides to us. We are dust of the earth, but also are immortal spirits. We are a mixture of good and

evil; we have an objective and outward nature, but also a subjective inward one. Both the beast and the angel are in us. Like the Pillar of Cloud and Fire, we are darkness and ignorance on one side, but on the other and hidden side burns that living fire which makes us conscious moral beings, and which will live on when our body of darkness has been discarded. Our physical body reveals a similar dualism. Every organ in our body is duplicated—two limbs, two eyes, two ears, two lungs, pairs of everything, one a Boaz, the other a Jachin. We have two brains, one positive by which we act consciously and voluntarily; the other negative, which is unconscious and involuntary and controls the sympathetic system. The combined use of these various organs is needed for perfect health; their union and balance is necessary to establish us in strength and sanity for the purposes of daily life. We draw in breath and give it out. We wake and sleep; we live and die. Our consciousness is positive and objective whilst we are alive and awake, but becomes negative and subjective when we sleep or die. Through and through we are stamped with the evidence of being a synthesis of two opposite forces, one active, one passive; one represented by the word Boaz and the other by Jachin, and experience of both of them is necessary for our welfare and growth.

Now, unfortunately, in most of us, these forces are not in balance; if they were we should be perfect beings; we should have found our Centre, the point where they meet and are established in equilibrium. But our material nature predominates over our spiritual nature; our darkness exceeds our light. We do not "stand firm"; we are very unstable, erratic, imperfect creatures; the house of our personality is far from being "established in strength." And so the whole purpose of our symbolic Pillars is to disclose the secret dualism of our constitution and to inculcate the necessity of bringing the two opposite sides of ourselves into equilibrium. A real Master Mason is one who has unified and acquired complete control over both the spiritual and material, the objective and subjective elements in himself, in whom the Pillars have become balanced, who has found the Centre or point of balance, who has acquired stability of character and peace of mind in all conditions, and who has mastery over the elements of Nature. For an example of such an attainment we may turn to the descriptions of the Christian Master in the Gospels, to the records of the great Magi and Mystics, or even to Shakespeare's portrayal of Prospero in *The Tempest*.

That is the second lesson inculcated by the Pillars. Before passing on from them let me refer to the great antiquity of their teaching. Homer refers to them (*Iliad* xxiv., 527) as two vessels or jars standing at the gate of heaven, one filled with good and one with evil, a blend of which is poured into each man's life

at birth. Ancient Chinese philosophy describes them as the *Yin* and the *Yang*, the basic positive and negative principles of creation. Probably there is no great race or religion in which they have not played a prominent part. Ages before their use in King Solomon's Temple, great religious festivals were held twice a year in Egypt and elsewhere, called the Festival of setting up the Pillars. One was in Spring, when the emphasis was on the Boaz pillar, and related to the ascent of the sun in the heavens, the renewal of the energies of Nature and the resurrection of vegetation; our old English May-day festival of erecting the May-pole was originally a religious rite of this kind. The other was in Autumn, at the fall of the year, corresponding with the feast of All Souls and the bonfire season, when the negative Jachin pillar was stressed in allusion to the waning of the sun's power, the falling to sleep of Nature, and the burning up of rubbish and refuse in an end-of-the-world bonfire. Thus one Pillar was associated with Life, the other with Death, the two complementary sides of existence. Later on in Christian Architecture the Pillars became permanently incorporated into the design of religious edifices. We still see them reproduced in the twin towers of Westminster Abbey, York Minster, and many other cathedrals. There they stand at the West front of the building, and all who enter, whether Masons or not, pass between Boaz and Jachin on their way to the altar in the East, just as in the Lodge every candidate enters between the Pillars on his quest for light. Some cathedrals, like York, have a third great central tower also, in which Boaz and Jachin are impliedly merged into unity at the centre of the building.

Another important piece of evidence of the origin and symbolism of the Pillars is to be found in a work of the 2nd century Christian Bishop Hippolytus, "*The Refutation of all Heresies.*" He tells us that at the temple-door of the Samothracian Mysteries, perhaps the most ancient of the Initiation-systems, there always stood two large human images; one a figure of darkness and imperfection representing man in his present fallen animal state; the other a figure of light, beauty and glory, representing the spiritual man who is destined to be born and built up out of the natural personality as the result of faithfully following the path of Initiation.

And this brings us to the final and conclusive corroboration of this idea, namely the Zodiacal Sign of Gemini, the Twins, which is traditionally represented by a figure of two pillars standing side by side but united or "established in strength," thus II. In ancient mythology the "Great Twin Brethren" were both said to be sons of the All-Father, but one of them was mortal, the other immortal. On the death of the former he became united to his brother and the two were translated permanently to heaven, in



sign whereof the constellation of the Twins has since shone in the night-sky, where these "two witnesses" testify prophetically to the redemption of the body of man, his reunion with his own higher angel-self, and the salvation and immortality of both.

### STEPS.

Now to acquire harmony and balance of the opposite forces or principles in ourselves and reduce them to unity, we must take certain measures or steps. These steps are illustrated by taking certain literal steps with the feet; steps which have no value in themselves, but which are invested with great symbolic significance.

What is a step? It is a progressive action, a forward movement towards some object or ideal, and each time a Mason takes one of our symbolic steps he would do well to remind himself of its meaning. He should realise that it is not an ordinary step, but a sacramental step, an outward and visible sign of his inward and spiritual desire to advance towards that perfection and that light which he has professed to be the predominant wish of his heart. (This point might usefully be explained and impressed upon Candidates when the step is imparted to them).

We ought, therefore, to know both *why* and *how* the step should be taken, so that we may take it correctly, reverently, and with understanding of its purpose. For want of this knowledge and understanding the step is rarely seen given with anything approaching accuracy; it is usually a casual, meaningless shuffle of the feet with nothing to distinguish it from ordinary walking. But the Masonic step is a quite distinctive one, and very different from an ordinary step.

*(The step is here given correctly, with an explanation of its movements and a method of testing its accuracy).* From this you will perceive that the step consists of dual movements; one involving motion forwards, the other a check or arrest of that motion. Thus the first movement is a positive one (Boaz), the second, a negative one (Jachin). Thus they correspond with the Pillars and are in exact conformity with the positions of the columns on the Wardens' pedestals, one vertical, the other horizontal. And the purpose of these two movements is to suggest that, as we advance, there must be a co-ordination of our intuition and our reason, of our subjective impulses with our conscious mind, of our spiritual energy with the inertia or resistance of our material nature.

The — foot moves first and points as it does, because it is associated with the heart, and the heart (or intuition) always tries to make a bee-line to its goal. The steps of ancient temples were always built in uneven numbers—3, 5 or 7—so that initiates might

arrive inside with the — foot first. The heart is proverbially wiser than the head; it is from the subconscious impulses of the heart that we aspire to what is higher than ourselves and are prompted to seek light in the Craft. Hence the propriety of the step beginning with the — foot and taking a bee-line direction and not the oblique direction that we take in ordinary walking.

The other foot, on the contrary, is associated with the head, the conscious rational mind, which although a necessary faculty in every day affairs is a very blind and untrustworthy guide in deeper matters, and should therefore be kept subordinate to the heart. A great philosopher once said, "the heart has its reasons of which the reason itself knows nothing," and does not our own teaching declare that "the heart should be taught to conceive before the eyes discover?" Both heart and head have their appropriate functions, and the head has often to act as a prudential brake or check upon the heart's ardent impulses. But no one will ever grasp Truth or learn the deeper secrets and mysteries of being by using his head alone; that way lie materialism, agnosticism, atheism. He must feel and apprehend Truth first in his heart, and use his brains afterwards to think out the intuitions of his heart and formulate them to his understanding. That is why our Step is made as it is, in a way that one foot acts as a check or brake upon the other, just as the head is meant to serve as a critical and prudent check upon the impulses of the heart.

Next observe another important point about the Step. When both feet are in position you will find that they form, as it were, a lock. You feel brought to a complete standstill. You are in a posture from which you cannot move forward or back till you have unlocked and released both feet. Also, the posture being an unwonted one, involves slight strain upon the leg muscles; you feel slightly lame in the — leg, because the eversion of that foot makes the leg feel rather shorter than the other.

Now this sense of deadlock and lameness have a purpose. They force you to realise that the Masonic step is not an ordinary or casual one, but one involving arrest of both the motion of the body and the attention of the mind; one which compels you to ask yourself *why* we adopt this posture.

As to the deadlock and coming to a standstill; these imply that, to apprehend Truth and Wisdom, we must first learn to *stand still*, with both heart and head, intuition and reason, Boaz and Jachin, duly balanced and adjusted to learn them. You remember how it is taught in one of the E. A. Lectures that, after their rush through the Red Sea, Moses commanded the Israelites to *stand still*, and told them that they would then see something wonderful happen; and also how Joshua stood still, giving the

2nd Degree Sign. And so with us. If we hope to acquire Wisdom and Light we must learn to stand still from ordinary activities and gain control over both body and mind. How few of us are able to do that, to stand still mentally, stopping the wild rush of disorderly ideas through the mind, and learning to acquire what Wordworth calls "a wise passiveness." It is "by still waters," unrippled by our feverish activities, that Truth becomes revealed to the mind. Our Step, therefore, is meant to remind us of the mental attitude we must learn to take up.

As to the sense of lameness induced by the Step, our remote ancestors had, among their religious conceptions, a god called Ptah by the Egyptians, Hephaistos by the Greeks, and Vulcan by the Romans. He was called "the lame god," and figures of him show him with one leg shorter than the other and standing in the position of our step. The Egyptologist, Sir E. W. Budge, declares that "the texts of all periods make it plain that he was the chief god of all handicraftsmen and of all workers in metal and stone. At a very early period he was identified with one of the primeval gods of Egypt and was called 'the very great god who came into being in the earliest time, father of fathers, power of powers, father of beginnings.' He was the great artificer in metals, at once smelter, caster and sculptor, as well as master-architect and designer of every thing existing in the world." He is often spoken of in mythology as the blacksmith of the gods, who forged armour for them and taught humanity how to work in metals like himself. It is easy to trace a devolution of this idea to that of Hiram Abiff as the Master Architect and cunning worker in metals described in our Scriptures, as also to that of the Creative Logos "by whom all things were made" of the Christian religion. But the point to be established at the moment is that this "Vulcan" reappears in the Hebrew Scriptures and in our Craft under the name of Tubalcaïn, "the first artificer in metals," a name imparted to every Masonic Candidate and identifying him with the idea expressed by that name.

Now what did these mythological references imply? Why was Vulcan called a lame god? Why does the Craft perpetuate the idea and associate its members with him? The truth behind the parable is this:—By being born into physical conditions the powers and energies of the human spirit become severely lamed and hampered by confinement in the material body and having to contend against material limitations and sensuous tendencies. We all know how great an obstruction the body is to the free action of the spirit. The soul is, so to speak (and as Plato, voicing the teaching of the Mysteries in *The Republic*, bk. vii., states), lamed and crippled by the resistance of matter and by the opposition of the body's desires; the spirit is often willing, but the flesh is too weak to do what we would. Yet that resistance and opposi-

tion are essential to the soul's growth, to the eliciting of its latent powers. The glory of man consists in the conquest of matter by his spirit and making it subservient to his will; there is no victory greater than that which a man achieves over himself and his lower nature. And so man himself was called an "artificer in metals" in the sense that, whilst in the body, he is a worker in physical conditions and learning to mould matter and bend it to his will; and Vulcan or Tubalcain was the "first" of such artificers in the sense that he served as a *prototype* and exemplar of every soul born into the world of matter and having to work in it and grapple with its difficulties.

Later in history, when many mythological ideas became absorbed into Christianity, the Christian Master also came to be spoken of as the "lame god," a divine being crippled by the limitations of the flesh; and sometimes in crucifixes or paintings of the Crucifixion one finds the nailed feet of Christ arranged approximately as in our step. It is possible, too, but conjectural, that St. Paul had in mind the idea of Vulcan forging armour for the gods when, in a great passage (Eph. vi., 10—18), he enjoined us to "put on the whole armour of light." Be that as it may, each of us may think of himself as an artificer in metals, learning to mould matter to our will and to acquire dominion over our own earthiness; each of us may think of himself as a lame god owing to our present restricted powers, and each of us may look forward to that liberation from our cramped position which the Hebrew prophet speaks of in saying that ultimately "the lame man shall leap as an hart" (Is. 35: 6).

There are still other Masonic Steps which are differently given and have special significance of their own. The irregular steps of the 1st Degree explain themselves. The five steps of the 2nd Degree as though ascending a w— s— indicate the spiral nature of all progress, for Nature has no straight lines, and all motion is cyclic and in ever upward spirals. The seven steps of the 3rd Degree, of which four are given in a particular manner, imply that whoever aspires to real Mastership must learn to trample down the desires of the body, which is as the grave of the soul, and attain complete control over it.

### SIGNS.

The Masonic Signs are even more instructive and full of meaning than the Steps. We can here deal only with those of the three Degrees, but were it possible also to consider that of an Installed Master and that of the Holy Royal Arch, you would see that they are all connected and that through the whole series of Signs there runs one continuous progressive idea.

Few Brethren, alas, understand the Signs or know how to give them correctly. Moreover, they regard them as merely ceremonial gestures to be used as salutes in Lodge or on proving a Brother's rank. This is a grievous error. The Signs, like the Step, are sacramental and in the nature of acts of worship. They are physical gestures expressive of certain attitudes of the mind. It is only incidentally that they are used as complimentary salutes. When addressing the W.M. it is, of course, quite fitting to accord him personal respect by saluting. But the gesture implies much more than a personal compliment to himself; it is an act of reverence towards that which the W.M. impersonates; it is an act of mental as well as physical homage to the Divine Wisdom of which the occupant of the chair of King Solomon is the temporary representative.

It is a great mistake, moreover, to suppose the Signs to be meant only for ceremonial use when we meet in Lodge. The Mason who understands his science and who tries to live the Masonic life as it is meant to be lived, makes regular use of them in private, and by their constant devotional and intelligent use finds them of great value in promoting his spiritual growth. Every day, in private, he does what he is taught to do when we assemble collectively in Lodge; he tyles the door of his chamber; he empties his mind of secular concerns and of all animosity or uncharitableness towards his fellow men; he stands to order as a Mason before the Great Architect, giving the step and sign of the Degree in which he desires to open the lodge of his soul to Him; then he meditates, prays, and performs other Masonic work; and finally he closes his own Lodge and locks up his secret perceptions in his heart. In this way he makes veritable and real progress in Masonic work, and comes to learn much that otherwise would remain concealed from him.

The 1st Degree Sign is related to the head and the Boaz pillar; the 2nd to the heart and the Jachin pillar; the 3rd to something which is higher than both head and heart, yet that embraces the properties of both—the Centre or inmost spirit in man. Each Sign has also a physiological reference which cannot be dealt with in a general address, and we will confine ourselves to the general significance. But first let us correct another common error. *A Sign should never be given without being accompanied by the Step*; for step and sign are two parts of a single action, and each is incomplete without the other. When the W.M. calls on the Brethren to stand to order, or the J.W. directs them to prove themselves in any Degree, he should require the Step to be given as well as the Sign, otherwise our work is imperfectly performed.

*The 1st Degree Sign.* Why does this relate to the head? As is obvious, it indicates decapitation, beheading. Why? Because

it is intended as an act of profound humility and abasement of mind on approaching the Divine Wisdom.

We are so prone to think that knowledge must be acquired through the head that it may seem strange at first that a candidate for Wisdom should be asked at the outset to (figuratively) cut his head off! But in all religion, the world over, humility is a first and last essential to the quest of Wisdom. "Be humble if thou would'st attain Wisdom; be humbler still when Wisdom thou hast attained." In the East the worshipper or seeker after Light and Wisdom prostrates himself, touching the ground with his forehead. In the prouder West he kneels or bows the head. But among Initiates the "prayer of humble access" has been signified by the manner in use with us. It is a sign traceable to the most remote antiquity and is found in figures belonging to the Minoan civilisation in Crete of ten thousand years ago. It is a sign that, in the search for Divine Light and Wisdom, the natural reason is so inadequate and obstructive a faculty for cognising them that it must be abnegated in favour of a higher faculty—the heart or intuition. And as the first movement of the Step is made from the side of the *heart* (or intuition), so, in contrast, the first Sign is one of abnegation of the *head* (or understanding) and is made with the — hand. Once more we see here the principles of the Pillars coming into play and the negative and positive forces they represent being applied.

The Sign is Biblically implied in the reference (in Rev. xx., 4) to those who were beheaded for the truth's sake, beheaded figuratively rather than literally; and in other ancient writings allusions to this mystical decapitation explains that the revelation of sacred mysteries is possible only to those who mortify the carnal reason and open their hearts to the Spirit of Truth and Wisdom. "If you see a severed head bounding upon our path, ask of it the knowledge of our secret mysteries"! says one of these old authorities.

The 2nd Degree Sign is an extremely beautiful one, very full of meaning, but usually the one which is the most imperfectly given. In contrast with the Sign of the 1st Degree, it relates not to the active head, but to the passive heart and intuition, and signifies their dedication and opening to the Almighty and their cleansing of all impurities. Our official Ritual refers to its use by Joshua while fighting the Lord's battles and praying for light to be continued to him until he had completely conquered his enemies. But this we are meant to apply to ourselves. We are all Joshuas. We have each our battles to fight with our inward "enemies" in the form of vices, darkness and imperfections. Within each of us is an inner light or sun—a conscience which enables to discern our shortcomings; it is that central sun or blazing star which in

this Degree the J.W. declares he has discovered in the centre of the building, *i.e.*, as shining within himself.

Accordingly the F.C. Mason imitates Joshua with a threefold Sign. First the h— sign, or sign of perseverance, with the — hand. In regard to this sign we may recall the "high hand and outstretched arm" mentioned in the Bible, and also the words of Walt Whitman, "I lift high the perpendicular hand; I give the signal!" It is a sign of h— or invocation by which the Mason invokes and, as it were, seeks to draw down Divine Power and Light into himself. Then with his other hand he makes the gesture of laying open his heart, tearing out the impurities or "enemies" he finds there, and casting them away from him. Finally, with the sign of f— he seals and locks up in his heart the memory of the grace he has received.

The Sign is, therefore, one of drawing in and casting out. With your negative pole you attract and draw in; with the positive one you repel, project, give forth; thus once more using the Boaz and Jachin forces.

The experienced Initiate, for whom the Signs are not formalities but real means of grace and power, uses this one for a variety of purposes. Here is one of the simpler purposes to which it is put. (*Here follows an oral instruction*).

Among the birth-legends of Buddha is one that, soon after being born, the child who was to become the Light of Asia stood erect, took seven steps forward and seven backward, and then pointed to heaven with one hand and to the earth with the other. By this sign he indicated that, like waking and sleeping, life and death constitute an ebb and flow motion of the soul between the seen and the unseen worlds, in the course of which man's lower and higher natures must become fused into a sevenfold unity, and that he is born on earth to achieve this end. The Buddhist Scriptures tell also of a great saint, Yashada, (a name suspiciously like "Joshua") who stretched forth his arm and compelled the sun to stand still in the heavens to enable the Buddhist doctrine of the Sacred Law to become proclaimed by the Emperor Asoka at the rate of thousands of shrines a day. Both these stories are no doubt apocryphal as history, but they are of deep interest to us as indicating that certain truths and symbols of our 2nd Degree were known and used by our Asiatic brethren centuries before our era.

The 3rd Degree Signs are five in number, which, in many Lodges, to their misfortune, are often reduced to three. We are expressly warned that they are not the full and genuine signs of a Master Mason, but temporary substitutions. The full and genuine ones are promised to be revealed to every worthy Brother

who earns the right to them by patience and perseverance, but even the substituted ones are eloquent with meaning and reveal a single idea expressed progressively.

To explain that idea adequately would be too lengthy a task in the present paper, since it involves a study of the significance of the Craft Legend of the murder of H.A. and the loss and confusion consequent thereon, all which is an allegory of the Fall of man and of his destined restoration from that Fall. Interpreting the signs in the light of that truth a simple explanation of them would run thus:—(1) The sign of h— expresses the dismay experienced at what, in religion, is termed the sense or conviction of personal sin and unworthiness; in giving the sign one as it were becomes suddenly conscious of and identifies oneself with all the sin and evil in the world, including one's own personal part in it. (2) The sign of s— is an act of personal sorrow and contrition for that sin. (3) Then follows the penal sign, to be explained presently. (4) The sign of d— points to the labour and distress experienced in the effort to escape from one's personal imperfections and to attain a state of purity and sanctity. (5) The sign of the W— S— (accompanied by the cry associated therewith) is the appeal of the anguished soul straining for spiritual birth and experiencing that "dark night of the soul" which is so well-recognised a psychological phenomenon of the higher reaches of the mystic way.

Let it be noted that the first and second of these signs are given with the face turned earthwards, whilst the fourth and fifth are with the eyes raised heavenwards. The third and midway sign (which is used as the summary and representative one of the Degree) is, on the other hand, given with the face looking neither up or down, but straight forward, as if illustrating the scriptural words "let thine eyes look right on"; it thus suggests the attainment of equilibrium and serenity of one who has passed through "the best and greatest trial" and reached that Centre in which earth and heaven are no longer regarded as separate, but are seen as merged in one.

In all the ancient systems of the Mysteries we find a final stage of acute suffering which equates with what, in Christianity, is called "the Passion" and with the Degree of Death in our Craft, and it is clearly to this that the fourth and fifth signs allude. As to the sign and cry of the W— S—, there is a tradition that they were used by Christ in the agony of Gethsemane. No one can place this higher than as tradition, or say whether that cry was answered; yet it is very significant that St. Luke's Gospel records that at the crisis of the Lord's Passion He uttered a cry, and that thereupon "there appeared an angel unto Him, from heaven, strengthening Him." That statement certainly suggests



that, on that occasion, the cry of the W.— S.— was both raised and answered.

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This by no means exhausts the explanation of these matters, and it is a pity we cannot here pursue them into the Installed Master's Board and the Holy Royal Arch. But perhaps enough has been said to reveal the deep significance of the Pillars, Steps and Signs, and to show that they have an interconnected progressive purpose in a definite and scientific system of initiation into self-knowledge and self-improvement.

If, in the light of these explanations, you now realise that, far from being merely ceremonial formalities, the Steps and Signs have a very living present value, you are asked to act upon this conviction henceforward, and by your example to encourage other Brethren to do the same. Our Craft system is so carefully and cunningly devised that, although its doors are open to those possessing the slenderest of qualifications, it safeguards its living truths in secret, even from its own members, unless and until they themselves labour to extract them and manifest the docility of mind and humility of soul necessary for receiving them. It guarantees to lead to true initiation those only who come properly prepared to be admitted to the secrets of initiation; all others are left with but a toy which may give them pleasure to play with, but from which nothing of vital value can be learned. Be assured that if you are faithful in comprehending and putting to habitual personal use such small things as the Steps and Signs and Working-tools, both in the Lodge and out of it, their use will lead you on to the understanding of greater secrets and mysteries than you now dream of as possible.

In *The Meaning of Masonry* I have shewn that physical birth is an initiation into the life of this world, and that it is a prelude and image of mystical rebirth or initiation of the soul into a yet higher order of life. Every child at birth enters this world by a straight and narrow way, passing between the pillars that support the temple of its mother's body, and thereafter it learns to adapt itself to its new environment, developing its latent faculties gradually and acquiring the knowledge which the ups and downs of physical experience impart. Thus does Nature initiate us into the secrets and mysteries of temporal existence. But the Initiation postulated by our Craft carries the process a stage farther than Nature's jurisdiction extends; it is one not of the body of man but of his soul, and it leads to secrets and mysteries of an ultra-natural order. It, like physical birth, necessitates a journey upon a straight and narrow way, a passage between the pillars of good and evil, of light and shade, of life and death, until we learn to equilibrate these temporal opposites and to blend them into :

stable unity in ourselves. As the Craft Degrees indicate, it calls upon us to proceed slowly and by degrees, taking one well-regulated step at a time and consolidating each newly won position before passing on to the next and still more arduous one. It requires us to display certain virtues—humility, perseverance, fidelity—not as merely formal signs, but as evidences of the texture of our being; and it may lead us through ordeals and trials, through distress and anguish, before we obtain the strength, security and serenity of the soul which distinguish the real Master Mason. Yet be assured that, in this process of rebirth, each truly taken forward step and rightly given sign will effect a liberation of the soul's latent powers and bring new and supersensual faculty into function.

That is the meaning and end of Initiation—the rebirth of the human soul and mind upon a higher plane of consciousness than it experiences in the natural state; and to promote that great attainment is the purpose of our Craft and of its symbolic Pillars, Steps and Signs.

W.L.W.

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