KEYSTONE OF THE MARK

An excerpt from *The Keys of Freemasonry* by Charles E Green and shared by Excellent Companion Robert Taylor

Since the formation of the Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of England and the Colonies and Dependencies of the British Crown, Mark Masonry has flourished. Indeed its prosperity has almost been phenomenal, for it now rules over 600 lodges and has recorded over 80,000 advancements of candidates. This, of course, is exclusive of the even larger number of Mark Master Masons who have been advanced in Scotch Lodges and chapters of the various sovereign territories in America and the countries and states of the British Empire.

The symbolism of the Mark Degree, unlike all other degrees in Freemasonry, may be comprehended in one emblem-the Keystone. Around this is woven the whole of the romance. Before passing on to further dissertations on the lessons of the degree, I might here mention the fact that the form of the ancient keystone was different from that now in use; it was cone-like in shape, with the point cut off, and was esteemed the sacred portion of the arch. One writer (Wymper) informs us that the original Keystone was neither square nor oblong, but a mixture of both; in other words, a Tau. In Java may be seen arches built up with square ashlars, one overlapping the other, and with a large tau keystone on the top, while Wymper states that in Cashmere he found traces of an arch built in that particular way with a tau keystone on top, and then cut into a curve afterwards. But whatever its shape may have been or is now, the symbolic significance of it is the main point for consideration. We can all appreciate its invaluable aid in the operative sense. To the ancients it was even more so, for in those days the knowledge of its use and construction was actually confined to a privileged few of the higher class of temple builders. To speculative Mark Masons of today it not only constitutes the jewel of the degree, but it also bears the special mark chosen by the mark mason on his advancement to the honourable degree.

Undoubtedly there are some emphatic lessons to be learned from the Mark Degree. Firstly, we are taught to appreciate the fact that honest work, faithfully and zealously performed, even though not appreciated by those who are witness of it, will in time vindicate itself and bring due reward to the performer.

Then there is the striking need for the practice of charity in its highest sense, charity in thought as well as in deed. Not to judge harshly and condemn the actions of others because we may not understand them. To act in charity to all mankind, and more especially to our brethren in Masonry, is a Masonic command which was not exemplified by the overseers in their treatment of the skilful Craftsman's work.

Speaking generally, the choosing of a mark should assist a brother to keep before himself in a concrete form, although hidden, his ideal, and his mark should ever remind him in his everyday life of his solemn promises, by way of his Masonic obligations, to strive for this ideal. It is typical of his spiritual mark, which is his moral and mental individuality, and the duty of every Mark Master Mason is to reveal that mark in himself to the eternal honour and glory of the Most High.

The high ideal of the Mark Degree is eloquently set forth in the exquisitely worded charge which concludes the ceremony. In essence it is this; that whatever successes or failures are our lot, whatever the warp and woof of life may bring for us, it is our duty to hold firm to our Masonic principles; whoever else fails us, Mark Master Masons will not; and as an encouragement to hope for better prospects we are to bear in mind that the stone which the builders rejected, possessing to them merits unknown, ultimately became the headstone of the corner.

Thus we see that a great responsibility rests on all who have taken the degree. Not lightly are we told to Mark well. Let me conclude this section with the hope that all Mark Master Masons will endeavour most seriously to realise their responsibilities and continue to mark in such manner that they may in very truth become living stones in a spiritual house, meet for the habitation of Him Whom we call the Great Overseer of the Universe.