THE KEY-STONE AND THE COPE-STONE.

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THE Degree of Mark Master Mason and Most Excellent Master Mason bear very evident marks upon them of the labors of ignorant and unskilful workmen. In the former degrees as now conferred the Key-Stone is introduced before its proper time, and out of its proper place in the order of Masonic Degrees. The Key-Stone appropriately enters only in the Degree of Secret Master. In modern Mark Masonry the Key-Stone is given as the general mark of a Mark Master; the individual or private mark being placed within the circle engraved on the face of the KeyStone and surrounded by the initial letters H.T.W.S.S.T.K.S., which none but Mark Masters have been taught to read aright. In the old Degree of Master Mark Mason from which that of Mark Master Mason has been developed or arranged by the modern innovators, the initiated were presented with a cubic stone, on one side of which appeared the circle, surrounded by the same mysterious letters, wherein to engrave the private mark. Thos. Smith Webb and his predecessors, however, got rid of the cubic stone, which common sense would have retained as the more appropriate form of mark, and introduced the Key-Stone in the wrong connection. The stones to be placed in the walls of the Temple; the plumbed, squared and leveled cubic stones, these were brought up by the Mark Masters with their marks upon them to designate whose work they were. The KeyStone was a particular stone, the only one of its kind, one which had been reserved for a special purpose, a purpose which it is no part of the aim of the Mark Master's Degree to explain, and there is no reason whatever why the form of the Key-Stone should have been adopted as the general form for Mark Master's marks. The cubic stone was the original form, and the introduction of the key-stone into its present place in Mark Masonry only confuses instead of correctly instructing the novitiate. The confusion here alluded to is of the only evidence of the presence of "tinkering" in the development of the Royal Arch system. It is not a little surprising that the Craft were found willing

to leave the matter of arranging the system now in vogue, the system which we know as the York Rite or the American Rite, in the hands of brethren so incapable of preserving the harmonies of the Institution. The only way to account for it must be, to suppose the Masons of two or three generations ago, to have been waning in that. quality of intelligence which would have been their only protection against the innovators. As a practical corollary from this we may safely say that nothing but the diffusion of sound Masonic knowledge by the Masonic Press can protect the Masons of future generations from innovations so marked that in time the harmony and historical and logical truth of the Masonic Institution and its various developments may be utterly destroyed.

The Degree of Most Excellent Master was not founded upon any Degree previously in existence. On the presumption that the completion of King Solomon's Temple would have be in some appropriate manner celebrated, and there being no degree devoted to the development of this theme the Degree of Most Excellent Master was invented expressly to fill the blank. Two Rhode Island clergymen for the matter, and Thomas Smith arranged the degree and introduced it into his system which is now so generally adopted in the United States.

It is to be hoped, for the benefit of their parishes, that these clergymen were better acquainted with the principles of theology than they were with the simple details of architecture. Had they possessed as much modesty as faculty for invention they would not have been guilty to the extent they were in throwing so much of confusion into the Royal Arch system as they have done. Webb and his co-workers committed the first grave error in substituting the key-stone for the cubic-stone in the Degree of Mark Master, and the authors of the Most Excellent, in a degree intended to celebrate the completion of the Temple and the solemn Dedication of it to its sacred purposes, committed the other grave error of confounding the cope-stone, or top-stone, the last stone to be placed on the building, with the key-stone to its principal

arch. We will merely mention here the further anachronysm of mixing up the celebration of the completion and of the dedication in one brief ceremonial, when the two events took place months apart. It would appear then that the key-stone is out of place in the Mark Master's Degree, and that it has been substituted by the innovators for the cubicstone. It would also appear that the inventors of the Degree of Most Excellent committed the mistake of confounding the cope-stone, or top-stone, which completed the building, with the key-stone which simply completed one of the arches of the Temple. This last named error was undoubtedly the result of. the substitution of the key-stone for the cubic-stone in Mark Masonry, and may be regarded as the continuation of one and the same error through two degrees, the object being to maintain by means of the key-stone a visible connection between the Degree of Mark Master Mason and Most Excellent Master Mason, as steps towards the Degree of the Royal Arch, and thus to indicate the order of progression, first by the supposed finding of the key-stone, and then the placing of it in its place in the Arch, which Arch is not the Arch referred to in the Royal Arch Degree.

The Degree of Mark Master partakes more of the nature of what is understood by the term side-degree, although its greater age. and much in its ceremony which is valuable and beautiful would entitle it to more consideration than the Degree of Most Excellent Master. The latter degree, although so modern an invention, fits better into the Chapter system than the former, and its ritual is very pleasing and fine. But neither Mark Master nor Most Excellent bear any clear relationship to the Royal Arch. ED.

George Helmer FPS
PM Norwood #90 GRA
PZ Norwood #18 RAM
MBBFMN #362