

The Mark Master

Additional Information for the Inquiring Fellowcraft

The Mark Master Degree is the first of the Royal Arch Degrees. It is certainly an extension of the Fellowcraft Degree, adding considerably more detail about our ancient craft, wherein is taught order, regularity, and discipline. It also relates to the Fellowcraft Degree in its organization. The officers necessary for the Mark Master Degree are identical to that of the Fellowcraft with the addition of three Overseers whose job it is to examine work to determine if it is acceptable for use in the Temple, thereby entitling the maker to receive wages.

In England, the Mark Master Degree is regarded with such high importance that it is not part of any other Masonic organization, but stands entirely on its own. Mark Master Lodges are organized into their own Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons, complete with a Provincial Grand Lodge officer structure (similar to our districts with District Deputy Grand Masters).

The degree of Mark Master is designed to teach the Masonic student that all labor is sacred, however and whenever performed, provided it is done in a spirit of service to humanity. The first section of the Mark Master Degree deals with how work was presented and inspected before acceptance for use in building. More important was a need to identify the work with the distinctive mark of the craftsman engraved upon each piece. If any of the work was found to be defective, it was an easy matter for the overseers to identify the faulty craftsman and remedy the defect. In this manner, those at fault were denied wages while the diligent and faithful craftsmen were paid. Marks were generally engraved upon faces of the stones which would not be seen, such as the face to which mortar would be applied.

Another problem encountered in the scale of a project such as the building of King Solomon's Temple was fraud. Considering there were 80,000 Fellowcrafts to be regularly paid, what would prevent an unworthy or unscrupulous person from fraudulently attempting to receive wages when they were not due him? The solution was a secret sign to identify those entitled, and at the same time to show their mark, so the Senior Warden would know that they were worthy of wages. In the demonstration of this process, an impressive lesson is learned regarding the punishment for fraudulently imposing upon the Craft. The offender is then reprimanded and sent back to the quarries to prove that he has a skill worthy of wages. This more fully explains the Senior Warden's duties (to pay the Craft their wages if any be due) briefly alluded to in the opening and closing ritual of the first three degrees in the Blue Lodge.

The next lesson presented to the newly made Mark Master, immediately after taking the obligation, is in the charitable and brotherly use of the Mark itself. Using a bit of misdirection, the new Mark Master almost violates the obligation which he has just taken. This firmly cements an understanding of how the Mark is to be used in addition to pointing out how easily and quickly we can forget or overlook a promise that has been made. It also points out the need to carefully examine ourselves, multiple times, before acting.

Once the lesson of receiving wages seems to be fully understood, the new Mark Master is given a pointed lesson in humility and the necessity of abiding by the law. The lecture of this degree explains the origin of our general mark to be none other than the personal mark of the most artistic of our original three Grand Masters.

The working tools of a Mark Master are the engraving chisel and mallet, those implements necessary for inscribing one's mark in the work which he produces. The chisel teaches the advantages of discipline and education. As it removes the rough exterior, revealing the hidden beauty of a gemstone, so education reveals the latent virtues of the mind. And, reason is to the mind as the mallet is to the workman. Enlightened reason curbs ambitions, depresses envy, moderates anger, and encourages good dispositions.

We are reminded that our conduct is in fact the product of our work as Masons which clearly bears our mark upon it. We should always act in a manner that will withstand the test of the Grand Overseer's square and thus avoid being cast aside as imperfect work, unfit for use in building that spiritual house not made with hands. We are also informed that should misfortune assail us, our Mark becomes a reminder of that friendship which transcends all distress and affliction, and that the stone which even the builder rejected, possessing merits to them unknown, became the chief stone of the corner.

For more information or to obtain a petition, please contact the nearest Royal Arch Chapter or the office of the Grand Secretary, Grand Chapter Royal Arch Masons in Virginia, 4101 Nine Mile Road, Richmond, VA 23223-4399. The office can also be reached via phone (804.222.9120) or e-mail: gsecgrac@comcast.net Their website is: <http://www.VirginiaRoyalArch.org>

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