

CONFIDENTIAL to Master Masons

A homily first given by the W.M., W. Bro. Alan Branford, in a Master Masons' Lodge at the meeting of Prince Alfred Collegians' Lodge No. 51 on Tuesday, 2 December 2014

Homily: Reflections on the Third Degree

by W. Bro. Alan Branford (© 1 December 2014)

From the Ceremony of Raising to the Sublime Degree of a Master Mason, an abiding memory for the candidate is the high drama of the Hiram story, in which he “has been made to represent one of the brightest characters recorded in the annals of Freemasonry, namely, our Master Hiram Abiff, who lost his life in consequence of his unshaken fidelity to the sacred trust reposed in him”.

However, without seeking to diminish the importance of the allegory, the intensity of this theatrical experience can overshadow the full meaning of the degree. This is exacerbated by the fact that in our speculative Masonry we rarely open in the Third Degree, unless it is to repeat the Ceremony for a new candidate. We thus spend little time reflecting on the wider lessons of the degree.

I refer you to the Exhortation. The Exhortation overviews the earlier degrees and thereby leads us to the final phase of our earthly existence in which we may contemplate death with a peace derived from the knowledge of a life hereafter. I quote from the Exhortation: “... Nature, however, presents one great and useful lesson more. She prepares you, by contemplation, for the closing hour of existence, and when, by means of that contemplation, she has conducted you through the intricate windings of this mortal life, she finally instructs you how to die. Such, my brother, are the peculiar objects of this Third Degree in Freemasonry. They invite you to reflect on this awful subject, and teach you to realize that, to the just and virtuous man, death has no terrors equal to the stain of falsehood and dishonour. ...”

The peculiar objects of this Third Degree are further illustrated by the Working Tools. “The Skirret points out that straight and undeviating line of conduct laid down for our pursuit in the Volume of the Sacred Law; the pencil teaches us that our words and actions are observed and recorded by the Almighty Architect, to whom we must give an account of our conduct through life; the compasses remind us of His unerring and impartial justice, Who, having defined for our instruction the limits of good and evil, will reward or punish, as we have obeyed or disregarded His divine commands. Thus the Working Tools of a Master Mason teach us to bear in mind and act according to the laws of our Divine Creator, so that when we shall be summoned from this sublunary abode, we may ascend to the Grand Lodge above where the world’s Great Architect lives and reigns forever.”