

The Mason's confession (Dundee Manuscript)

Anonymous, 1727

To the Anonymous of the Scots Magazine.
SIR.

Some time ago a Mason living at a considerable distance from me, whom I knew to have the character of a sensible and religious man, sent me a long paper, all of his own handwriting, and subscribed by him; in which he makes a confession of the oath word, and other secrets of his craft. When he wrote that paper, and for a good time before, he was confined by bodily distress; and he represents his having been brought under a conviction of whole affair as a mystery of iniquity. His narrative is intermixed with reasonings from many texts of scripture, and otherwise, about the iniquity of the matter. He considers the oath as profane and abominable, what was sinful for him to take and sinful to keep; he treats of all the secrets which are therein sworn to, as a compund of superstitious ceremonies, lyes, and idle nonsense; and he renounces the whole as a horrid wickedness. At the same time, he urges me to publish the paper for the conviction of persons engaged in that oath, and for warning others to beware of the snare; allowing me to discover his name, his place of abode and the Lodge he belonged to.

However, I have only drawn out his narrative, which I here offer you, in his own words, for a place in your Magazine; leaving the world to judge of the matter as they please.

He informs me that the account he gives is only of what he himself was taught, according to the usage of the Lodge in which he entered; without regard to some circumstantial variations which may take place in some other lodges, while they agree in substance. And indeed an absolute uniformity among them cannot be supposed, if, according to what follows, the whole affair must be committed only to their memories, and share in the common fate of oral traditions.

A mason's confession of the oath, word and other secrets of his craft.

These are to testify, concerning that oath, word and other secrets held among the corporation of masons; wherein I was taken under the same, by sundry of them gathered together and met at D about the year 1727.

Concerning the oath

After one comes in at the door, he that keeps the door, looses the garter of his right-leg stocking, folds up the knee of his breeches, and requires him to deliver any metal thing he has upon him. He is made to kneel on the right knee, bare; then the square is put three times round his body and applied to his breast, the open compasses pointed to his breast, and his bare elbow on the Bible with his hand lifted up; and he

swears, "As I shall answer before God at the great day, and this Company, I shall heal and conceal, or not divulge and make known the secrets of the Mason-word, (Here one is taken bound, not to write them on paper, parchment, timber, stone, sand, snow, &c.) under the pain of having my tongue taken out from beneath my chowks, and my heart out from beneath my left oxter, and my body buried within the sea-mark, where it ebbs and flows twice in the twenty four hours."

Immediately after that oath, the administrator of it says, "You sat down a cowan, I take you up a mason." -- when I was taken under that oath, I knew not what these secrets were which I was not to divulge, having had no information before. One person in the Lodge instructed me a little about their secrets the same day that I entered, and was called my Anonymous; and another person in the Lodge, whom I then chused to be my instructor till that time twelve-month, many called my intender; ---- There is a yearly imposing of that oath in admissions among the said craft through the land on John's day, as it is termed, being the 27th of December.

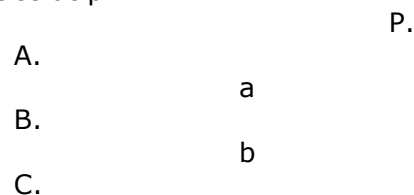
Concerning the word.

After the oath, a word in the scriptures was shown me, which, said one, is the mason-word. The word is in I Kings vii,21. They say Boas is the mason-word, and Jachin a fellow-craft-word. The former is shewn to an entered apprentice after he has sworn the oath; and the latter is shewn to one that has been a prentice at least for a year, when he is admitted to a higher degree in their lodge, after he has sworn the oath again, or declared his approbation of it.

Concerning the other secrets

I shall next shew a cluster of different sorts of their secrets.

First, then, three chalk lines being drawn on the floor, about an equal distance, as at A.B and C: the master of the Lodge stands at P., and the fellow-crafts, with the wardens and entered apprentices, on the master-mason's left hand at ff and the last entered apprentice at p.



Says the master, "Come forward". says the prentice "I wot not gin I may." says the master, "Come forward, warrant you." no coming over the line with one foot, while he sets the other square off at a. he lays the right hand near the left shoulder, and says, "Good day, gentlemen."

Coming over the second line with one foot, while he sets the other square off at b. , he lays the right hand on the left side and says, "God be here". Coming over the third line with one foot, while he sets the other square off at c. he lays the right hand on the right knee and says, "God bless all the honourable brethren". N.B. as the square was put thrice about his body when on the bare knee, so he comes over these lines setting his feet thrice in the form of a square.

question. What say you? answer. Here stand I. (with his feet in the form of a square) younger and last entered apprentice. ready to serve my master from the Monday morning to the Saturday night, in all lawful employments.

Q. Who made you a mason? A. God Almighty, a holy will made me a mason; nineteen fellow-crafts and thirteen entered prentices made me a mason. N.B. To the best of my remembrance the whole lodge present did not exceed twenty persons; but so I was taught to answer which I can give no reason for.

Q. Where's your master? A. He's not so far off but he may be found. Then if the square be at hand, it is offered on the stone at which they are working; and if not, the feet are set in the form of a square as before shewed, being the posture he stands in while he repeats his secrets and so the square is acknowledged to be master, both by tongue and feet.

Q. How set you the square? A. on two irons in the wall; if two will not three will; and that makes both square and level.

N.B. If they ca, in two irons above and one below, it makes a kind of both square and level; though ordinarily they ca, in but one. And the reason it is said set square and not to hang it is They're not to hang their master.

Q. What's a mason? A. He's a mason that's a mason born, a mason sworn and a mason by trade.

Q. Where keep you the key of your lodge? A. Between my tongue and my teeth, and under a lap of my liver, where all the secrets of my heart lies; for if I tell anything in the lodge, my tongue is to be taken out from beneath my chowks and my heart out from beneath my left oxter, and my body to be buried within the sea-mark, where it ebbs and flows twice within the twenty-four hours.

Q. What's the key of your lodge? A. A well hung tongue. Q. Are you a mason? A. Yes. Q. How shall I know that? A. By signs, tokens and the points of my entry. Master Shew me one of these.

Prentice. Shew me the first and I'll shew you the second.

So the master gives him the sign., with the left hand up the side. P. Heal and conceal.

N.B. The token or grip is by laying the ball of the thumb of the right hand upon the first or uppermost knuckle of the second finger from the thumb of the other's right hand.

Q. How many points are there in the word? A. Five.

Q. What are these five? A. The word is one, the sign is two, the grip is three, the penalty is four and heal and conceal is five.

Q. Where was you entered? A. In a just and perfect lodge.

Q. What makes a just and perfect lodge? A. Five fellowcrafts, and seven entered apprentices.

N.B. They do not restrict themselves to this number, though they mention it in form of questions but will do the thing with fewer.

Q. Where should the mason-word be given? A. On the top of a mountain, from the crow of a cock, the bark of dog, or the turtle of a dove.

Q. How many points are there in the square? A. Five.

Q. What are these five? A. The square, our master, under God, is one; The level, a two, the plumb rule, a three, the hand-ruler four and the gage is five.

The day that a prentice comes under oath, he gets his choice of a mark to be put upon his tools by which to discern them, so did I chuse this, (The figure is in the MS.) which cost one mark Scots. Hereby one is taught to say to such as ask the question, where got you this mark? A. I laid down one and took up another.

If one should come to a mason working at a stone, and say, "That stone lies Boss", the prentice is taught to answer, "It is not so Bass but it may be filled up again." or "It is not so boss as your head would be if your harms were out."

Q. When doth mason wear his flower? A. Between Martinmas and Yule.

Q. What is mason's livery? A. A yellow cap and Blue breeches meaning the compasses.

Q. How many Jewels are there in your lodge? A. Three.

Q. What are these three? A. A square pavement, a dinted ashlar, and a broached dornal.

Q. What's the square pavement for? A. For a master-mason to draw his ground draughts on.

Q. What's the dinted ashlar for? A. To adjust the square.

Q. What's the broached dornal for? A. For me, the younger and last-entered prentice to learn to broach upon.

Q. How high should a mason's seige be? A. Two steeples, a back, and a cover, knee-high all together.

N.B. One is taught, that the cowans stage is build up of whin stones, that it may soon tumble down again; and it stands half out in the lodge, that his neck may be under the drop in rainy weather to come in at his shoulders and run out at his shoes.

Q. Where lies the cappel-tow? A. Eighteen or nineteen foot and a half from the lodge door; and at the end of it lies the cavell-mell, to dress the stones with.

N.B. There is no such thing among them as a cappel-tow.

Q. Where place ye in the lodge? A. On the sunny side of a hill, that the sun may ascend on't when it rises.

N.B. A lodge is a place where masons assemble and work, Hence that assembly or society of masons is called a lodge.

Q. How stands your lodge? A. East and West, as kirks and chapels did of old.

Q. Why so? A. Because they are holy; and so we ought to be.

Q. How many lights are there in your lodge? A. Three.

Q. What are these three? A. The south-east, south and south-west.

Q. How many levels are there in your lodge? A. Three.

Q. What are these three? A. The sun, the sea and the level.

N.B. I can give no reason why the sun and the sea are called two of their levels, but so they will have it.

To be particular in shewing how the master-mason stands at the south-east corner of the lodge, and the fellow-crafts next to him, and next to them the wardens, and next the entered prentices, and how their seiges stand distant from another, and the tools they work with, is not worth while.

Q. Where lay you the key of your lodge? A. Two feet from the lodge door, beneath a green divot.

N.B. This is meant of their oath under which the secrets of the lodge are hid from the drop; that is from the un-entered prentice, or any others not of their society, whom they call drops.

Q. How long should a prentice wear his shirt? A. Till there be nine knots in it; three up the back, and three down each arm.

There are likewise various other signs, which they distinguish or discern themselves by. As, if one were in a company, and to send for another mason, he does it by sending a piece of paper, with a square folded in at the corner, and suppose he squeeze it in his hand, when it is opened out, the mark where the square point was folded in, is the thing that's noticed. Or, if he send his glove, then the square put on the first knuckle of the second finger, with the thumb nail, or some other thing.

To find another by drinking, one says, "Drink". The other answers "No". He saith the second time, "Drink". The other answers, "After you is good manners" Again he saith "Drink I warrant you". And then he takes it.

Coming to a house where masons may be, he is to knowck three knocks on the door, a lesser, a more, a more. One gives the sign of the right hand up the left side; or if riding, he is to strike the horse over the left shoulder. If in a land where their

language is not known, he is to kneel with one knee, holding up his hand before the masons.

If one coming into a company, wants to know whether there be a mason in the same; as he comes in, he makes himself to stumble, and says, "The days for seeing, the night's for hearing; God be thanked we all have our formal mercies. "There is no difference between a dun cow and a dun humble cow." Then, if a mason be in the company, he says, "What says the fellow? He answers, "I say nothing but what I may say again. There is no difference between a dun cow and a dun humble cow."

A mason's horse is found out among others by the left foot stirrup being laid up.

To know if one or more masons be in a company which one meets on the way, he says, "Who walks". Then, if one be there, he says, "A man walks." If more be there the answer is "Men walk" Then says he "Good men and masters met you be: God bless all your company." Or he gives the sign, by the right hand above the breast, which is call the fellow-crafts due guard. and the grip, by clasping his fingers at the wrist, next at the elbow; or placing himself hand to hand, foot to foot, knee to knee, ear to ear and says "Great you, great you, God greateth you, and make you a good master-mason: I'm a young man going to push my fortune; If you can furnish me you will do well."

I shall now give an account of what they call the Monday's lesson. ---- When the prentice comes to his master's kitchen-door, he is to knock three knocks; a lesser, a more and a more. If none answers, he is to lift the sneck, and go in and wash the dishes and sweep the house.

Q. How far is the prentice to carry off the ashes? A. As far off until he see the smoke come out of the chimney head.

After that he goes to his master's chamber door, and knocks three knocks; a lesser, a more, and a more and says, "Master are you waking? If he answer, "Not so sound but what I may be wakened." then he goes in. His master asks him "What's a morn is it? He answers, "It is a fair morning; the wind's in the west, and the sun's in the east' past five, going six." His master says, "Who told you that?" The prentice answers, "he met with a hather man" "Ay (says his master), sorrow is ay soon up at the morn.

Q. How doth the prentice give his master his shirt? A. He gives it with the left sleeve foremost, and the neck of it next to him, with the breast of it upermost, in readiness to put on. In like manner he gives him the rest of his cloaths. After that , he gives him water to wash himself; then he offers him a cloth to dry himself; he will not have that; he offers him his shirt-tail; he will not have that; then he bids him do his next best. After that he follows his master up street, down street, with his right foot at his master, a left, sword point, within stroke of a nine inch gage till he come within sixteen feet and an half of the lodge-door, there he prentice leaves him. And he goes to sort up the lodge, and put the things in order; after which, he calls in the men to work.

And this is the amount of that inventer matter; or all I can remember that is material in it.

P.S. There was printed, in the year 1747 (ix.404) A protestation and declinature from the society of Operative masons in the lodge at Torphichen, to meet at Livingston kirk. Dec 27, 1739: subscribed, of that dat, at Kirknewton, by James Chrystie: with a subscribed adherence, at the same place of the same date, by James Aikman, Andrew Purdie and John Chrystie: and with another subscribed adherence, at Dalkeith, July 27, 1747, by John Miller.

In that paper, they renounce the mason-oath, as finding the same "sinful and unlawful". both as to its matter and form, and therefore not binding upon their conscience." They declare, that it is imposed and administered, "With such rites:, ceremonies and circumstances as are in themselves sinful and unwarrantable and a symbolising with idolaters; such as; kneeling upon their bare knees, and the naked arm upon the Bible;" --- That "it is and must be to intrant be sworn rashly; without allowing a copy of the said oath and time duly and deliberately to consider the lawfulness of it; the matter thereof, or things, sworn to therein, never being under their serious consideration previous to the swearing of that oath; seeing the person swearing knows what he is swearing to;" -- That they "do look upon the dreadful wickedness, superstition, idolatory, blasphemy and profanation of the name and ordinance of God, which is contained in and annexed to that oath, altogether unbecoming the name and professions of Christians; by the which unlawful means of secrecy, many are rashly and inconsiderately precipitated and slily drawn into that sinful confederacy and wickedness above said, ere ever they can be aware of it." --- What "it is an appending the seal of a solemn oath, containing horrid, dreadful and uncommon imprecations, to a blank, yea to worse, to ridiculous nonsense and superstition: nonsense, (and that with this aggravation, of profaning the sacred scriptures, by intermixing them therewith), only fit for the amusement of children in a winter-evening; most of the secrets being idle stuff or lyes, and other parts of it superstitions, only becoming heathens and idolaters." -- Moreover, they declare, that the secrecy is broke and disclosed, by "what is already published to the world in print; concerning which, (they say) there have been many lyes and equivocations, in denying the same, though they contain in the substance of the mystery.

I am etc.

D.B.