



UGLE Oration

The Master

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The 'Master' explored and explained.

Summary

A deeper exploration of the term 'Master' and its associated symbolism.

Keywords

Third-Degree, Master, Solomon, Square

The Master

Who is Master of your Lodge? The answer may seem too obvious to be questioned: you can see him now, in the East, sitting in his special seat, raised up above his officers. He is wearing a collar distinguishing him. The collar, however otherwise it may be richly adorned, always bears the symbol of his office: this is a simple square. Yes, that elected Brother at our head is the Master. It is plain for all to see.

Except that, in Freemasonry, what may seem obvious may carry deeper meanings to those in the know. You don't need to know. If you do, however, happen to know, that knowledge may give you some satisfaction, some enrichment of your Masonry, which is nice. More importantly, the hidden knowledge may provide something to aspire to, a fuller appreciation of the meaning and subtlety of our remarkable Craft. To pass this by is a shame. For Freemasonry has much meaningful depth for those who persevere to learn its secrets. And so it is as regards the Master. We learn from the Ritual why he is placed in the East:

'As the Sun rises in the East to open and enliven the day, the Worshipful Master is placed in the East to open the Lodge and employ and instruct the Brethren in Freemasonry'. The Master is the rising sun; we are enlightened by him.

We learn from the manner of his Installation that he is placed figuratively, and rather specially, in the Chair of King Solomon. He therefore presides over us to mirror, so far as he is able, the admirable qualities of that king, summed up in one word: wisdom. We would all surely wish to be guided and led by wisdom. The Worshipful Master represents wisdom, which starts with order, seeks understanding, proceeds with prudence, and is an art rather than a science.

The Proverbs ascribed to Solomon commence with an explanation of their purpose:

*'That men may know wisdom and instruction, understand words of insight,
Receive instruction in wise dealing, righteousness, justice and equity;
That prudence may be given to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth—
The wise man also may hear and increase in learning, and the man of understanding acquire skill,
To understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles'.*

The Worshipful Master in his office, as promulgator of our Masonic art, so admirably just depicted, represents all this! Who, hearing this, counts himself worthy to sit in King Solomon's chair?! What an ideal!

But there is more. Several of our early Masonic catechisms, written down in the 1720s and 30s, ask the question: *'Who is Master of all Lodges?'* The answer given is: *'God and the Square'.*

The important document, "A Mason's Confession", of about 1727, refers to, *'The Square, our Master under God'.* So it would seem that King Solomon was himself seen as taking his particular role as an agent of God; that behind a wise Solomon we should see an infinitely perfect God. Another document, "The Whole Institutions of Free-Masons Opened" of 1725 includes the following among its explanations:

'The reason why Masonry received a secret was because the building the House of the Lord pleased his Divine Majesty: it could not well go amiss, being they wrought for so good a Master. And had the wisest Man on Earth to be their Overseer'.

So, who is the Master? The answer is not so simple. We have a human being at its head. We have him sitting in the Chair symbolical of the legendary King Solomon. And we have King Solomon himself acting as Overseer for the Almighty.

When building the great Temple in Jerusalem *'the House of the Lord'*, Solomon consulted with his late father's friend, King Hiram of Tyre, and by King Hiram's advice employed Hiram A' biff, a man filled with wisdom and understanding, and cunning to work all works in brass. And he came to King Solomon, and wrought all his work.

A text known as "The Graham Manuscript" written in 1726 explains this more fully:
'The word 'cunning' implies ingenuity; as for 'wisdom and understanding' when they are both found in one person he can want nothing; so, by this present scripture it must be allowed that the widow's son whose name was Hiram had a holy inspiration, as well as the wise Solomon.'

Here we get to the nub of the matter. Solomon received his wisdom from God because he did not aspire to possess merely material things. He had 'a holy inspiration'. Hiram Abiff is also seen as possessing 'holy inspiration'. The empowerment of the Overseer and the Servant alike is by 'holy inspiration'. The Master of a Masonic Lodge similarly, at his Installation, is held up in prayer to be endued with wisdom to comprehend, judgement to define, and ability to enforce obedience to Divine Law, and also to be sanctified, strengthened, and enriched with genuine knowledge to enlighten the minds of his Brethren so that, like Solomon and the Temple, he might consecrate our humble dwelling-place, the Lodge, to the Almighty.

The encompassing symbol of all this is the square. As is stated by those early documents already quoted:
'First, observe that all our signs is taken from the square...'

Is this true? Think about it, and, having thought, crispen your observance; it is the principal signification of our forefathers in the Craft, as anyone who visits Freemasonry in Scotland will quickly notice. To discover why that should be so is a revelatory quest well worth pursuing.

So, ignoring any other paraphernalia, the Master's simple square around his neck speaks volumes to those who, with open eyes, can look, both at him ... and to the beyond ... to the Master of all Lodges!

*'Who wears the square upon his breast
Does in the face of God attest—
And in the face of Man—
That all his actions will compare
With the divine unerring square,
That squares great Virtue's plan:
And he erects his edifice
By 'this' design, and 'this', and 'this'.*

You don't have to know all this, but is it not uplifting when you do?

##END##

Note: The poem is the first verse of 'The Emblems of the Craft' by Brother Dr Robert Morris, Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky. The last line of this verse (which is used throughout the poem) should be accompanied, where indicated respectively, by three movements in the EA sign: up, across, and vertically down to the side; all three, of course, crisply square.

Recommended use of Papers

Papers offer a simple, direct means of advancement in a particular aspect of Masonic knowledge. They can be used in a variety of ways:

- Read at home for private study
- Shared for pre-reading by members of a discussion group
- Read aloud in Lodge or Chapter, or in an LOI/COI/new members forum
 - Followed by 'any questions'
 - As a precursor to a discussion (*in which case much more time is needed, possibly more than double that allocated to the paper itself*)
 - Supported by audio-visual aids, if necessary.

They can be delivered by a single person or split into bite-sized pieces and read by multiple presenters (*in which case, the speaker(s) should have read and practiced the delivery of the paper beforehand*).

If the paper is to be used to introduce a discussion, the presenter will need to have thought about the material, done a little research, and prepared some open questions to engage with the audience. Kipling's dictum can be of help in preparing open questions, which should begin with one of his 'serving men', as follows: *'I keep six honest serving men (they taught me all I knew). Their names are, What and Why and When and How and Where and Who'*.
Rudyard Kipling

If used as part of an event, the paper should be advertised and promoted by way of trailers, flyers and announcements, in summonses, letters, emails, notice boards, and on social media.

For further papers and other learning materials visit "Solomon" at <http://solomon.ugle.org.uk>

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