

THE THIRD DEGREE CHART

M.W. Bro. N.C. Hart, M.A.

The following explanation of the Chart for the Third Degree is adapted from the Lectures on Symbolism of the late M.W. Bro. John Ross Robertson, with a few additional comments for completeness and simplification. The original wording is almost identical with that of the late Albert Pike. Reference to some of the symbols which are not used in the ceremonies approved by the Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario have been omitted.

While this chart may be found in most Lodge Rooms, it is seldom used and, indeed, many Masons have never seen it. In the ceremonies of the Third Degree, there is considerable repetition and, as the explanation of the chart is a recapitulation of some of the history and symbolism, reference to it has evidently fallen into disuse. It is, nevertheless, of considerable historical interest and quite comparable to the charts used in the other degrees.

The Harris Code, used in the United Grand Lodge of England, has been the basis for the interpretation of the various Hebrew characters on the Chart.

1. The M.M.'s Chart is an oblong, circumscribed a black border, in which are inserted the letters W., N., E. and S., representing the four cardinal directions and indicating the correct orientation of the large central emblem. It is covered with symbols, among them being the emblem of mortality (sk. & c.bs.), conveying to the initiated a lesson of the certainty of death.

The principal figure is the black c. on a white background; at the head of the c. is a sprig of Acacia; the c. reminds us of the uncertainty of life and of the dark abode to which our bodies must be consigned to become the prey of worms and corruption. The last rites paid to the dead are useful lessons to the living. From them we derive instruction, and we should consider all such solemnities as a warning for us to be prepared for our own approaching dissolution. The massive walls of the palace of a King and the clay-built cottage of the lowly pauper are equally pregnable by death. In strength or weakness, in health or sickness, in wealth or poverty, all in one undistinguished level must fall beneath his mighty arm. The silver cord of life is cut in twain and "the mourners go about the streets," for the reunion of the body and soul when thus separated exceeds all human power.

2. The white ground is expressive of purity and innocence. In all the ancient mysteries white was an emblem of splendour and purity and was the colour considered most pleasing to the deity.

3. In Oriental countries, from time immemorial, it was customary to decorate the graves of loved ones with some sacred tree or flower which bloomed perennially over them as though to say "O death, where is thy sting? O grave thy victory?" The true acacia is the thorny tamarisk. It grows abundantly even in deserts, and of it "the crown of thorns", which was placed on the head of Jesus of Nazareth, was made. It is a fit type of immortality on account of its tenacity to life; for it has been known, when planted as a door post, to take root again and shoot out budding boughs over the threshold. The bursting forth of plants into bud and blossom after having been dormant

through winter, or through any dry period, has been a symbol of the conquest of death And of eternal life.

4. The acacia, like the laurel and myrtle, was an emblem of honour. This symbol teaches us that in this life, of which the third degree is symbolical, innocence must lie, for a time, in the grave; at length, however, to be called by the word of the G.A.O.T.U. to a blissful immortality.

5. The sk. and c. bs. Are eloquent emblems of mortality. The c. sk. And c. bs. Allude to the untimely death of H.A.B., which occurred about the year of the world 3000. The word AB signifies father or master. In the original Hebrew, the prefix "Abi" is the possessive case of "Aba", which signifies father -or figuratively a superior, hence the interpretation, H. the Master.

6. H.A.B. is symbolical of Truth on Earth. The tools with which H.A.B. was slain were the P.R., the L. and the heavy S.M. The symbolism of the first two was explained in the F.C. degree as justness and uprightness of life and action, and equality, and the last may be interpreted as destruction.

7. The figures 5.5.5 allude to the 15 conspirators who determined to obtain the Master's Word. They are symbolic of those who strive to obtain, by unjust means, those benefits which result only from faithful service and attention to duties. These figures, likewise, have an allusion to the 15 F.Cs., who were organized into three Lodges and who departed from the entrances of the T. in search of the missing G.M., H.A.B., and his murderers.

8. The three steps usually delineated on the carpet or floor cloth are emblematic of Youth, Manhood and Old Age. In youth, as E.As. we occupy our minds in the attainment of knowledge of moral truth and virtue; in Manhood, as F.Cs. We should apply our knowledge to the discharge of our respective duties to God, our neighbour and ourselves so that, in Old Age, as M.Ms. we may enjoy the happy reflections consequent on a well spent life, and die in the assurance of a glorious immortality.

9. The entrance to the porch or room is surmounted by an arch and, through the withdrawal of the veil, it is seen to be the S. S. of the Temple which contains the Ark of the Covenant, overshadowed by the Shekinah or Blazing Star, the light of Divine power, pointing the Way of Truth. The Hebrew characters on the Arch are "Kadosh l'Adonai" or "Holiness to the Lord". The S.S. was the Most Holy Place, and here were four Cherubim, the two lesser constructed by Moses, of massive gold, and the two larger by K.S., and plated with gold. The former were attached to the lid of the mercy-seat and the latter spread their wings over it as an ornament and protection. The Ark of the Covenant, which K.S. placed in the S.S. at the Feast of Dedication, is also called the Ark (of) Alliance. K.S. placed it in the centre of the S.S. beneath the B.S.; the Ark being an emblem of the alliance God had made with his people and the circle which encloses the triangle in the B.S. an emblem of the alliance of Brother Masons.

10. The ornaments of a M.M's. Lodge are the Porch, the Dormer and the Square Pavement; the Porch was the entrance to the Temple, the Dormer was the window that gave light to the Sanctum Sanctorum, and the Square Pavement was for the High Priest to walk on. His office was to burn incense to the honour and glory of the M.H. and to pray fervently for the continuance of peace and prosperity to the Israelitish nation throughout the ensuing year. Tradition informs us that, at

the time that H.A.B. went into the S.S. at high twelve to offer up prayers to the M.H., the Ark of the Covenant had not been placed there, for that took place at the time of dedication, after which no one was permitted to enter, except the H.P. and he only once a year, on the great Day of expiation of sins, when he had a cord about his waist, which extended into the court of the Tabernacle, so that he could be drawn forth from the S.S. in case sudden death overtook him while officiating therein.

11. The five-pointed Star, which must not be confused with the Blazing Star, is not found among the ancient symbols of Masonry, and is undoubtedly of recent origin; it is emblematic of the five Points of Fellowship, which refer to virtues which every Mason is required to practice, -Hand to Hand, to greet Brethren; Foot to Foot to support a Brother; Knee to Knee to pray for a Brother's welfare; Breast to Breast to keep inviolate a Brother's secrets; and Hand over Back to uphold a Brother's reputation as much in absence as in his presence.

12. The S. and Cs. are important emblems in each of the three degrees but, in neither the E.A. nor the F.C. are the Cs. fully exposed, while in the third degree both pts are shown, indicating that we are now at liberty to work with them to render the Circle of our Masonic duties complete. In this degree, the pts were pressing on your Nd Lt and Rt Bts to emphasize the situation and importance of Virtue, Morality and Brotherly Love. With the Cs, a circle may be drawn beginning at a point and coming back to the point where it began. By this emblem we represent the beginning of life, and the circle we run until the moment we arrive at the end and our eternal destination, thus indicating the completion of our earthly pilgrimage and suggesting the continuity of existence.

13. The Square is a symbol of morality -and is an emblem of the Master of the Lodge. In every Masonic degree it teaches the same lesson, namely Truthfulness and honesty. To act upon the Square is synonymous with square dealing. As a Masonic symbol, it is of very ancient date and was familiar to operative masons.

14. In 1830 an architect, rebuilding an ancient bridge called Baal Bridge, Limerick, Ireland, found, under the foundation stone an old brass square, much corroded but showing the inscription, "I will strive to live with love and care, upon the level by the quare. A.D. 1517," which shows that our speculative Masons had very good reasons for adopting the working tools of the operatives.

15. The Square and Compasses combined in Masonic symbolism refer to a Masons ' duty to the Craft and to himself, hence the emblem is universally recognized as a symbol of Brotherhood.

16. The Blazing Star as a Masonic symbol has been interpreted as a symbol of DP of the Star of Bethlehem, of Prudence, of Beauty and of the sun. Whether it forms the centre of a square or of a triangle, or a circle, it represents the Sacred Name of God as a universal spirit who enlivens our hearts, purifies our reason, increases our knowledge and makes us wiser and better men. So the Blazing Star may be interpreted as a symbol of perfection. The letter G is a symbol of the G.A.O.T.U. The circle is the symbol of the Almighty's eternity, the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, without beginning and without end.

17. The equilateral triangle is and always has been a symbol of Deity, -among the Hebrew, a Yod ? -, in the centre of an equilateral triangle was an emblem of Jehovah-, and the mode of expressing His incommunicable name

18. A Master Mason's Lodge is said to be opened on the Centre, because the Brethren present being all Master Masons are equally near and equally distant from that imaginary central point which, among Master Masons, constitutes Perfection. Neither of the preliminary degrees can assert the same conditions, because a Lodge of Entered Apprentices may contain Entered Apprentices, Fellowcrafts and Master Masons; and that of Fellowcraft may include Fellowcrafts and Master Masons; therefore, the Masonic doctrine of equality is not carried out in any of them.

19. The All-Seeing Eye is an emblem of the omniscience and omnipresence of the G.A.O.T.U. and should remind us that all our thoughts, words and deeds are known to Him; it should also teach us to be ever thoughtful in the faithful discharge of our duty to Him, to our neighbours and to ourselves.

SO, the Chart of a Master Mason points to the resurrection from the dead, to a future state of reward or punishment, and its silent symbols eloquently exhort us to pass faithfully through things temporal so that we may not, ultimately, lose the blessing of the Eternal.