

CURIOUS MASONIC WORDS

Freemasonry has many curiosities, and indeed, many mysteries as yet unsolved. Among the former are several often misunderstood words with odd or involved meanings.

ABIMAN REZON is the title still used by South Carolina and Pennsylvania for their Books of Law. It was used in years gone by also by Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Maryland and Nova Scotia. It was the title given by Dermott to the Book of Constitutions of the Grand Lodge (*Ancients*) of England. Presumably the words had an Hebraic origin, but no one has as yet settled on a translation so authoritative that all are satisfied. "Will of Selected Brethren", "Secrets of a Prepared Brother", "Royal Builder", "Brother Secretary", "Intimate Brother Secretary", "A Prepared Brother", are all suggested meanings by various scholars who adduce various Hebrew words and their compounds as possibilities for the meaning Dermott had in mind when he first used the syllables as a title. Scholars also dispute the pronunciation. Ah-HIGH-man REE-zon is common, but the better scholarship seems to indicate that properly the second word should be pronounced with the accent of the second syllable--Re-ZON

LEWIS is an iron tool inserted in a cavity in a large stone, which expanded as it is pulled upwards, holds the weight of the stone firmly as it is swung through the air by a derrick so its position in the wall of a building. Both the term and the invention are very old. Pennsylvania used it as a symbol of strength, but as such it is absent from the symbolism of other Grand Jurisdictions. Masonically, the word is universally used to denote the under-age son of a Freemason. Obviously the term has so applied because the strength of a man's later years is in his sons, and the lewis, in England as in Pennsylvania, is a symbol of strength. In England a dispensation may be obtained, permitting the initiation of a lewis under twenty-one years of age. In Scotland any lewis may be initiated at eighteen. In North Dakota, a lewis may apply to a lodge before his is twenty-one, but cannot be initiated until he has reached man's estate. The Classic instance of a lewis being initiated in this country is George Washington, who was only twenty years and some months of age when he became an Entered Apprentice in "The Lodge at Fredericksburgh" (*Virginia*), November 4, 1752 In France the term is not lewis but louveteau, but has the same meaning.

The ABIF of Hiram Abif does not appear in the Bible. The word Abi or Abiw or Abiv is translated in the King James version both as "his father" and "my father" - using the word "father" as a term of respect and not as denoting a parent. Hiram, the widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali, was "my father" in the same sense that Abraham was "my father" to members of the tribes of Israel. The thought that the two syllables are a surname is obviously in error. The legend gains, not loses, in appeal when Abif becomes a title of honor. Just when and how it came into the Masonic terminology is still a moot point; it does not appear in the Regis document (*oldest of our Constitutions, dated approximately 1390*) but does appear - only as one name among many - in the Dowland manuscript of 1550. Apparently the term was not in common use until after the King James Bible (*1611*) had become familiar in Masonic circles. The story of Hiram Abif as

told in the Masonic tale is not found in the Bible, nor is there any meaning in the word which can be construed as part of the story as Masons tell it, except that of veneration.

DUE GUARD is two words, forming one, which scholars fight over and Masons accept as a matter of course. Every Mason knows what it is. None apparently, really knows where it came from. Mackey says that it is a contraction of "duly guard". According to the great authority it is an Americanism and not used abroad now to mean what we mean, even though two hundred years ago it was the name given to a sign. Some who dare to raise their small voices against the thunder of the great Mackey are convinced that the words are a contraction or alteration of "Dieu-garde" -- "God guard" -- of the French. Haywood gives both Mackey and the immediately foregoing as a choice; Dr. Pease is wholly on the side of Mackey. Authorities with less fame still cling to a derivation from the French words, probably because of their poetic content more than any etymological foundations. Universally in this country a ritualistic difference is perceived between the due guards and the signs, but as a matter of actual practice a due guard is a sign and cannot be taken from the category of signs by a mere definition; even the ritualistic definition of a sign does not preclude the due guard from the classification.

COMPASSES-COMPASS. From the standpoint of the dictionary, these are two words with totally different meanings. A COMPASS is a suspended magnet so balanced that it may turn upon its pivot and orient itself with the North magnetic pole and thence (with the aid of tables and mathematics), point out the true North. COMPASSES is the word used to describe that instrument which draws circles and/or measures small distances; sometimes COMPASSES are called dividers. Like trousers and scissors, COMPASSES is always plural when meaning the instrument--except in six Grand Lodges of the United States which use the word COMPASS in the same way as their neighbors use COMPASSES. COMPASS is from the Latin *Com* (*with*) and *passus* (*a step*) --an instrument which is used "with a step"-- in other words, dividers. Masonically, it appears to be more a measuring than a circle drawing instrument, although reference to its Masonic use includes "circumscribe desires." But its position, open sixty degrees upon a quadrant, as in the symbol of a Past Master, would seem to indicate that it is more as dividers than as an instrument to draw arcs of circles, that it is important Masonically. With the square it forms two of the three Great Lights of Masonry, and has become so universally recognized as a symbol of Freemasonry that courts have forbidden its unauthorized use or its being copyrighted or trademarked for commercial purposes.

Few wholly Masonic words have been so much talked about and so little understood by the average Mason as "COWAN". Every one understands that it is a term of contempt; that it denotes some one wholly without the Masonic circle; but just what its real meaning may be, where the word came from, how it came into our system, is disputed to this day by Masonic scholars. It is generally - not wholly - agreed that it has a Scotch ancestry. certain old Scottish books lend color to the theory. according to these tomes a COWAN is a man who builds walls without mortar-as any farm hand in America may do, piling into a wall the stones from nearby streams or turned up in ploughing. From this the term came to be used as meaning an uneducated Mason, a self-taught builder, one not of the trade. Apparently its earliest appearance is in the Schaw Manuscript, dated 1598. It appears in the second, or 1738 edition of Anderson's constitutions. Scott puts the words into the mouth of one of his characters. Whence came the word? A Greek word KUON means dog, and in early church days infidels were called dogs,

probably because of such passages as Matthew 7:6- "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs." old Swedish KUJON means a silly fellow. The French word COYOU means a coward, a base person. Mackey had a different theory; that COWAN was either a derivation of, or the ancestry of the English word "common". Old English spelled the word both coen and comon. If this is correct, COWAN, meaning common, is still a term meaning the lesser, vide "common people," also the English "House of Commons" as distinguished from the House of Lords. However derived the word is now wholly the property of the Fraternity, not otherwise used, and means to moderns an uninstructed and ignorant person, one not of the Fraternity, just as eavesdropper means to us one who attempts to gain the secrets of Masonry unlawfully.

Moderns do not go as far as bloodshed over the word "HELE" (pronounced HAIL), but in spite of the determinations of philologists and Masonic authorities who may well be considered final, now and then some more or less learned Freemason wishes to change either the meaning of the word or its pronunciation, or its spelling, or any two, or all three! HELE is almost invariably associated with the word "conceal" (as it should be) and "HELE and conceal" may be translated by transposition-"conceal and HELE". "HELE" is old Angle-Saxon belan, meaning to conceal. "Conceal" is Norman, and means to hide. Dr. Pease has well brought out that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries language in England was part Norman-French and part Angle-Saxon and that early ritual writers, desiring to make sure that no misunderstanding was possible, often expressed ideas in word pairs, one word from each language. Hence such phrases as "HELE and conceal", "parts and points", "Free will and accord", etc. To the objections of those who contend that "HELE" should be pronounced "heel" because it rhymes with "conceal and reveal" the answer is that in the early days of the language, our "conceal" was pronounced "consayle" and our "reveal" was pronounced "revayle". The word "HELE" (meaning to hide) has no connection with the word "heal", meaning to make whole again, or Masonically, make legitimate, nor with the word "heel", meaning part of the foot, or with the word "hale", meaning in good health, or the word "hail", meaning to call to, or greet.

Few words are more wrongly used, at least in Masonic circles, that "oath". A candidate takes upon himself a solemn obligation to do certain things and to refrain from certain actions. the word "OBLIGATION" is from the Latin-of (*to*) and ligare (*to bind*). It is a tie, a bond, an agreement, a profession of intention, a responsibility, a duty agreed upon, a constraint of action, a pledge, an acknowledgement of promises made. In no such definitions can be found any similarity to the meaning of the word "oath", which is the concluding phrase by which the assumer of the OBLIGATION calls upon that which he holds sacred to witness his vow. In a court of law the witness swears to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. That is an assumed OBLIGATION. He ends "So help me, God" which is the oath, attesting to the sincerity of his OBLIGATION. In taking both OBLIGATION and attesting it by the oath, the witness is required to raise his right hand, a curious throwback to ancient days in which a man offered his right hand to be cut off if his oath was broke,. Still more an oddity is the small boy's attestation "by golly" made without knowing that he is offering the ancient "gol"(*hand*) if he tells not the truth! The Masonic OBLIGATIONS are high-minded duties voluntarily assumed by candidates as their part in becoming brethren of the Ancient Craft. the oath which they take is their attestation of the validity of the covenants the thus make. To speak of the whole as a Masonic "oath" is to name the whole for a minor part.

Words change in meaning as the centuries pass. The classic examples are the word "hell" and "hellfire" which in the King James Version (Mark) mean a place where refuse and garbage are burned and in more modern eschatology becomes a place of punishment, somewhat worse than the sheol of the old testament. Among words much used in Masonry two-PROFANE and LIBERTINE - have changed in meaning with the passage of the years. Anciently "PROFANE" came from "pro" (*without*) and "fanum" (*temple*) and signified one uninitiated, not within the circle of the Craft. "LIBERTINE" was once a free thinker, one who did not subscribe to the doctrine of the church ". "PROFANE" in common parlance is now one given to taking the name of God in vain and the "LIBERTINE" is a licentious person. Masonically a profane is merely one not initiated, and an "irreligious libertine" is an agnostic or an atheist, and not a man of promiscuous habits.

Anciently the word "TOKEN" (from the Anglo-Saxon *tacn*, a gesture, a sign and art) was properly used as we use it Masonically. But through the years it has changed, in common parlance; now may be an offering of flowers to a lady or a box of cigars to a man. In Biblical days the word was used to signify a memorial or other reminder of a covenant or promise as the rainbow was "a TOKEN of a covenant". In Freemasonry the TOKEN is never a thing, always an act.