

THE LEWIS OF FREEMASONRY.**(By J. Fairbairn Smith, F.P.S.)**

Since the publication of Waiter W. Fuller's biography of the new Grand High Priest of the Grand Chapter, Royal Arch Masons of Michigan, there have been literally hundreds of requests as to the meaning of the term, "Lewis Mason," and the intent of this article is to attempt to give our readers definite information relative to the Lewis in Masonry. English, Scottish, and Irish Freemasonry exclusively identifies the son of a Master Mason as a Lewis. This is also true in some Grand Jurisdictions of the United States, notably in Pennsylvania, which follows more closely the landmarks of the Ancient Craft as laid down by the Grand Lodge of England.

In ancient times the son of a Mason occupied a distinct position, and it is declared in some of the old Masonic lectures that because the duty of a Lewis, or son of a Mason, to his father was to bear the heavy burden in the heat of the day and help him in time of need," his most important privilege for so doing entitled him to be made a Mason before any other person, however dignified by birth, rank or riches, and while still a minor. Thus, the Lewis Mason is one who has been initiated, passed and raised by special dispensation before having attained the age of 21 years. As a matter of fact, a Lewis may become a Mason without dispensation in Scotland after he has reached his 18th birthday.

The Lewis is an instrument made use of by Operative Masons to hoist heavy stones. It is an iron clamp or cramp which is inserted in a cavity prepared for that purpose in large stones. By virtue of the Lewis the stone is attached to the pulley or hook and may be conveniently raised to any height, safely controlled, and finally deposited in its proper position. In the ruins of Whitby Abbey, in England, which was founded by Oswy, King of Northumberland, in 658, large stones were discovered, with the necessary excavation for the insertion of a Lewis.

Wherever and whenever Operative Masons have plied their art, the Lewis has been used. Therefore, the Lewis in operative Masonry is as old as Masonic Symbolism. Just when and where its use was first introduced into the art of building, we are unable to say. It was used, however, long before medieval architects erected the great Cathedrals of Britain and Continental Europe, which are still, after hundreds of years, the finest examples of Gothic architecture, and in their rare and supreme beauty have been designated as "symphonies in stone."

The old Romans knew the Lewis and the ancient ruins of Rome have disclosed its use. Its symbolism is exceedingly interesting and instructive, and British Masonry pays particular attention to it. The Lewis is to be found on the tracing board of the Entered Apprentice, which depicts it as a symbol of strength, for by it, the Operative Mason is able to lift the heaviest stone with comparatively little exertion or physical power. It symbolises the peculiar means by which a heavy stone can, through the instrumentality of the Lewis, be hoisted and deposited in its appointed place and thus become a part of the common mass of strength and beauty, and it might be added, just as the Lewis is essential to the successful completion of the building, so are the sons of Masons necessary to the perpetuity of the Masonic institution.

The symbolism of the Lewis and many of the privileges which are accorded to him by British Freemasonry have seldom been adopted by the American Craft. There are, however, many instances where young Americans have been raised to the sublime degree of a Master Mason before reaching their majority age. A notable example of this procedure was the initiation of George Washington in Fredericksburg Lodge, of Fredericksburg, Virginia, when he was only 20 years and 8 months old. This surely is evidence that America has, in the past, recognised the symbolism of the Lewis and the privileges which he is presumed to have enjoyed. At any rate, this is undoubtedly the most plausible explanation why America's most distinguished Mason and Citizen was initiated before attaining the full age of 21 years, for it is natural to presume that since British Masonry, together with its rights and privileges, had a very definite influence upon early American Masonry, the privilege of the Lewis must have been recognised by the Lodges of those early days.

In Browne's "Master Key," which is supposed to represent the Prestonian lecture, we find the following definition:—

What do we call the son of a Freemason?

A Lewis.

What does that denote?

Strength.

How is a Lewis depicted in a Mason's Lodge?

As a cramp (clamp) of metal, by which, when fixed into a stone, great and ponderous weights are raised to a certain height and fixed upon their proper basis, without which Operative Masons could not so conveniently do.

What is the duty of a Lewis, the Son of a Mason, to his aged parents?

To bear the heavy burden in the heat of the day and help them in time of need, which, by reason of their great age, they ought to be exempted from, so as to render the close of their days happy and comfortable.

His privilege for so doing?

To be made a Mason before any other person, however dignified by birth, rank, or riches, unless he, through complaisance, waives this privilege.

Since the Lewis in Masonry symbolises the duty which a son owes to his father during a period when his powers are sinking and his strength is failing, surely modern Masonry can find sterling reasons why it should foster and develop among the sons of Masons a feeling that they indeed are entitled to certain privileges. The progress of the institution of Freemasonry should be made primarily by virtue of the sons of Masons. The physical strength, alertness and acumen of these sons should be combined with the spiritual, moral and intellectual strength which flows from the concepts and teachings of Freemasonry. As a consequence, the Lewis, or son of a Mason, could symbolise the strength by which our fraternity lives and prospers, for just as Operative Masons cannot conveniently form the work of Operative Masonry without the aid and assistance of the Lewis, Speculative Masonry cannot grow and develop without the sons of Masons to replenish its diminishing ranks caused by the ravages of time. For this reason alone Freemasonry in all ages has extended to the son of a Mason the prior right of becoming a Master Mason and thus recognises the importance of sons to our ancient and honourable institution. It is by reason of this process that Freemasonry can be assured of its future. The son of a Mason today is its leader of tomorrow. Thus, the thinking Mason will readily agree that the symbolism of the Lewis so long unheeded by American Masonry could be of definite benefit to the Craft today.

—"N.S.W. Freemason."