

Kneel On Your Naked Knees

By JOSEPH T. HOWARD

THOSE solemn words, "Kneel on your naked knees," given to us by the Senior Warden at the moment before we take upon ourselves the obligation of the Sublime Degree of Freemasonry, carry much more than the instructions for getting us in "due form" before the Altar.

Let us point out first, that the knees are among the most useful and useable body parts that we possess. I have a friend who has two artificial lower limbs. The mechanical knees lock in place when he stands up. This makes his gait very laborious, if not quite awkward. Climbing stairs is a difficult chore and ascending a steep hill an impossibility. We take our knees for granted until their use is impaired. When I was a small boy I was struck by an automobile and had a stiff left knee for about six months. I still remember what a thrill it was to get that knee to bending again. It should, I believe, give us no uncommon stimulus to bend our knees to go to the relief of a distressed worthy brother. Too few of us climb the stairs to his sick room or to the place of his problems in order to extend a practical demonstration of our brotherly love and friendship. Our stiff unbending limbs inform our brethren that we no longer care about them. Let

us remember that one of the five points of fellowship is "knee to knee" which may be to teach us that unless we *bend* the knee we can not make the fellowship contact complete.

Let us next note the naked condition of our knees. They are exposed. As such they remind us *again* that, "we brought nothing into the world and can surely take nothing out of it." This is not merely a hack phrase of the hyper-religious. It is a simple statement of fact that even the irreligious must admit. But much more than that, for those of us whose faith is in God, it clearly symbolizes our unadorned condition in the presence of our Maker. This puts us in the proper frame of mind to be good Masons since we are taught that outward appearance (especially before the GAU) is of no account. Unless we are already "Masons-committed" in our hearts, kneeling on our naked knees will not make us any more so. Our knees being naked simply *reminds* us further of our proper place in the universe and before God.

I would like to suggest further that kneeling is a posture of power, penitence and compassion.

It is said that in some occupations a common working position is on

the knees. An old stone mason when asked why he worked from this apparently awkward position replied, "I can get more power into the blow of my hammer!" Even as our ancient operative brethren found power to strike the blows necessary to divest stone of their superfluities, in a kneeling position, so we as speculative Masons may find the power to divest our lives of the extraneous elements which keep it from fitting into the plans of the Master Builder, *down on our knees*. A beautiful scene in Masonic history is portrayed when King Solomon kneels beside the grave of Hiram Abiff for the purpose of prayer. The prayer itself is deeply moving and inspiring but I am more impressed by what King Solomon says when he has finished his prayer. He says, "My mind is now clear!" Power to clear away doubts, fears and uncertainties comes while we are in the kneeling posture. We too, like King Solomon of old, can rise with clear minds to do whatever we know that we must.

No Mason can claim that he is better than another. We work "on the level." We can not, like the Pharisee of old, claim to be better than others. We must each admit our weaknesses, shortcomings and failures, for as we are taught in the Great Light in Masonry, "Pride goeth before a fall." If we fall on

our knees before we fall flat on our faces in failure, we as penitent persons are much more likely to behave as we ought both in and out of the Lodge. Kneeling as a posture of penitence is a constant reminder to our mind and conscience that "no man ought to think more highly of himself than he ought to think."

It may be a piece of outmoded melodramatics to see the impassioned lover on his knees before his beloved at that crucial moment of asking for the hand of his lady fair. On the other hand, who can say that such a posture failed to convey clearly the meaning of the act? We kneel on our knees in an expression of our love to God. There is also a bowing down of spirit in compassion when we extend our love to the brethren, our filial feelings for one another. Kneeling on our knees should ever put us in remembrance of faith, hope and love. Of these three the latter is by far the greatest. It suffers long, it is kind, it is not puffed up nor does it think evil of anyone. These truths among others are brought home to us clearly during a portion of the Fellowcraft work. As we kneel on our knees for *any cause* we should be reminded of these lessons on love. May it ever be, then, that Brotherly Love will continue as we symbolically *continue* to "Kneel on our Naked Knees."



Let us discard all this quibbling about this man and the other man, this race and that race and the other race, being inferior and therefore they must be placed in an inferior position. Let us discard all these things, and unite as one people throughout this land, until we shall once more stand up declaring that all men are created equal. —ABRAHAM LINCOLN