

## The Deil Among The Masons

by William Harvey J.P.

Dedicated to every merry Mason who has passed from Labour to Refreshment on Saint Andrew's Day.

In Scotland there's a strong belief,  
That Masons wi' the deil are chief,  
An' that their Points an' Circles spell  
Some awfu' mystery o' Hell ;  
Douce ministers of a' the kirks  
Regard the Craft as fou o' quirks  
An' say the Mallet, Square an' Level  
Are tradesmarks of a wily Devil.

Why sic-like thochts sud be, I doubt  
Wad beat man's wisdom to find out.  
Aiblins they rase in times land past  
When witches wove their spells, an' cast  
The evil-e'e owre sheep an' kye,  
An' garred them a' gang yeld or dry ;  
Or rade on broomcoves through the air,  
Or threw themselves in shape o' hare,  
An' met at midnight hour to pree  
The deepest draughts o' devilry,  
An' sneck young bairns across the wizen,  
Or droun puir sailors by the dizzen.

Through nane could tell how Auld Mahoun  
Begood the Craft, the news gaed roun'  
That he was Maister, an' the Ludge -  
As far as ministers could judge -  
Was whaur, wi' mystic sign an' word,  
He banned the Kirk and cursed the Lord.  
Sometimes some chield o' generous mood  
Wad praise the ancient Brotherhood,  
Maintain they placed their faith in prayer,  
An' strave to act upon the Square,  
But Cowans swore the thing was haivers,  
That God's Guid Beuk was torn to taivers,  
An' that when Cloutie g'ied the nod,  
Nae Mason cared for man or God.  
Now, droll as it may seem, the Craft,  
Though whyles abused an' often chaffed,  
Held oon its road, no carin' ocht  
What livin' moral threiped or thocht.  
Its mind was free, its conscience clear,

An' what was dune a' men micht hear  
When, wi' the portal closely tyled,  
The Brethren frae their records wyled  
Rules for the guidin' o' the race -  
That peace to war sud ne'er gie place -  
Thus workin' out the Mason's plan -  
A noble brotherhood of man,  
Wi' little care an' less o' evil,  
An' nae hobnobbin' wi' the Deevil.  
Indeed, how slender is the shaft  
Connecting' Nickie wi' the Craft  
A' men may learn by this narration  
O' what cam' owre a merry Mason -  
The Tyler o' Ludge Royal Bracken,  
Kent far an' near as Jeems M'Cracken.

'Twas ae fine munelicht Hallowe'en -  
That time when witches tak the green,  
An' warlocks work their cantraips dire  
An' faires flee on feet o' fire,  
An' water kelpies prowls at large,  
An' Nickie gies his angels charge  
Of a' that chance to be abroad  
When midnight mak's an eerie road  
An' ilka shadow shields a ghaist,  
An' fouk imagine they are chased  
An' pass the kirkyard gate wi' speed  
For fear some fiend sud gar the deid  
RISE frae their graves an' shak their shroud  
That Jeems M'Cracken, flegged an' cowed,  
Crap trummlin' hame an' tauld Tam Paton  
What passed atween him an' Auld Satan.

This nicht his Mother Ludge had gathered  
To see a dorbie duly "brithered,"  
And owre a foundin' pint explain  
How best to lay the Corner Stane.  
Wi' baps and beer, an' toast an' sang,  
The time sped cantily alang;  
The knock gaed birlin' round to twa  
Ere ony thought to slip awa',  
An' the wee hand was close on three  
When the last rites o' Masonry  
Saw Jamie start to stoiter hame  
Wi' bizzin' heid an' riftin' wame.

As ower the road, athort the muir,  
Free frae a' wardly thocht an' care,

Jeems stappit out, the setting' mune  
That lichted up the lift abune,  
An' a' the starns frae east to west  
Seemed in a blinkin' to owrecast,  
The sky grew dull an' dark as death  
An' Jamie (haudin' in his breath  
When something gae an awfu' sneeze)  
Drappit in fear upon his knees,  
Prayed a' the prayers that he could mind,  
Then keekit nervously behind,  
Syne looked afore, an' gie a squeel,  
For there (God help him) stude the Deil! -

The Deil wi' een like coal o' fire!  
Wi' horns that well micht dreid inspire!  
Wi' chafts that girned, an' beard that shook  
An' smelt a' owre o' aize smook!  
Wi' tail twa ells lang, at the least,  
Outrangin that of ony beast,  
An' cled in black frae tap to tae!  
Wi' fear puir Jeems grew cauld an' blae.

"Guid mornin', Brither," quo' the deil,  
"I houp, guid Sir, I see you weel?"

The speech brocht Jamie's courage back.  
"Godsake," thinks he, "I'll hae a crack  
Wi' this black billie, an' mak sure  
Just what he kens aboot the Square.  
I'll probe the hail thing to the boddam  
An' of it's sae that I can snod 'im  
I'll maybe end that daft-like plaister  
Which says the rascal is our Maister."  
"Guid mornin', friend," then Jamie said  
Cockin' some cannily his head,  
"Sin' you mak free to ca' me Brither,  
Juist tell me now, how auld's your Mither?"

"My Mither!" leuch the Deil, "I' faith,  
As sure as breeks are made o' claith,  
Or apples grew on trees in Eden,  
An' you on baps an' beer were feedin',  
I wad hae sworn that you had raiter  
Been seeking news about your faither."

"A, sir," quo' Jeems, "thats prief I'll swear,  
That you were never on the Square,  
Or my fair question you'd hae kent

An' seen at aince juist what I meant,  
An' gien yours Mither's age aff-reel,  
I'm doubtin' you're nae Mason, Deil."

"Ca canny there, ca' canny noo,  
You're no sae donnert though you're fou,  
An' weel you ken that I can shaw  
That I'm the Faither o' you a'!  
I'll wad a guinea to a goat  
The Scottish Kirk has banned the lot  
O' you as sinfu' sons o' mine  
What learned the ga' o' Rule an' Line  
An' a' your secret pairts frae me  
Wha first invented Masonry."

"A' lees," cried Jeems; "A' lees an' waur,  
We take nae notice o' the glaur  
That ministers and elders baith  
Have splairged on us. I'll tak my aith  
That what they sae is but a fable.  
Guid guide us! frae God's beuk I'm able  
To prove to a' wi' een to see  
You hadn'a haen the First Degree,  
Or, by the Mallet an' the Level,  
You'd never hae taen your job as Devil!"

"Ne'er taen my job!" an' Cloutie hotched,  
"Man, sin' you've that sair subject broached,  
As sure as three times twa mak sax  
I'm up in a' your Mason knacks -  
Fand the haill dollop up in heaven,  
Ken a' about Three, Five an' Seven :  
The Three that rule a Ludge; the Five  
That haud a Ludge, an' mak it thrive,  
The Seven that guide in on the plane  
Whaur Wisdom, Strength, an' Beauty reign ;  
The Ark, the Anchor, an' the Bell,  
I ken them a'! The Parallel  
That Moses made wi' Solomon  
Is now, I think, made wi' Saint John.  
Sirs me! What mystical appears  
I've kent aff-loof, five thousand years!"

"Ay, ay" said Jeems, "it sets you weel -  
God knows, you are a clever Deil -  
Thus glibly to say twa-three phrases,  
(An a' the time sing your ain praises!)  
Nae doubt, afore your wild rampage

You used the Gavel an' the Gauge,  
But, still an' on, your Mason lore  
You maun hae left ahent the door  
That day you got the unco shove  
That dang you frae Grand Ludge above.  
Now Sawtan, sin' that time o' terror,  
I wonder if you've seen your erro,  
An' if sometime you green to enter  
A Lodge that opened on the Centre?"

"Weel, Jeems, atween oursels, I'll granr  
That whyles I feel a kind o' want,  
But, heth, I'm dour as you may guess -  
An' thrawn as you'd be - to confess  
The sin that drave me doun to dwell  
Amon' the fallen saunt o' Hell,  
But noos an' thans I tak a thocht  
Of a' the tirr-wirr I have wrocht,  
An' muse on Mallet, Square, an' Plumb  
Wi' Jubela an' Jubelum."

"Thae balgyairds! They're weel het in Hell.  
Ise was, you've Jubelo as well?  
A trinity o' mansworn knaves  
Owre bad to rest within their graves,  
Nae fire ablow will purge their crime,  
They're dammed ayont the end o' time;  
I houp they're ladlin' lowin' coals  
Upon ilk other's luckless souls."

"Deed then, they're no'," quo Nickie Ben,  
"We've punishments unknowen to men.  
They're biggin' temples ilka day  
Wi' meltin' lave - saft as clay,  
Frae plans that seem to them absurd  
Because they lack the Masons' Word!  
They're thirled to an uneven Skirrit -  
Fit emblem o' their want o' merit;  
Their Chisel, Compasses, an' Mell  
Are red-het as the fires o' hell;  
Their Plumb's a' squint, an's so's their Level  
They're free wi' aiths as ony Devil.  
But though wi' cursin' they grew hoarse,  
It's ne'er abune a single course  
Their wark wad heichten for the found  
Is laid on ever-shiftin' ground;  
Year in, year out, in endless pain,  
They cry, 'Wae's me! The Maister's slain.' "

At Satan's word Jeems stude aghast.  
He thocht on a' his sins bypast,  
An' what micht happen to himself'  
If, sae be, he gaed down to Hell.  
He looked in silence for a wee,  
"Then, Cloutie, since you've nabbed that three,"  
He wispered, "Tell me this, I pray,  
O' Masons, have you mony mae?  
Or dae they get, as they expect,  
A fair wind frae the Architect  
Wha dwells within the Heavenly Ludge  
An' hauds the balance as the Judge  
Of a' thats dune at kirk or market  
By mortals frae the time they're sarket?"

"Weel, Jamie," said auld Satan quick-like,  
"I've Kaiser Bill, an' twa-three sic-like,  
Ill loons that dung the warld ajee  
By cursin' God an' servin' me,  
But as for ordinar brither chiel,  
They're no' the stuff that mak gude deils;  
They're faur too constant on the Square  
An' place their faith owre much in prayer.  
They guide their ways by Rule an' Plummet,  
An' thus gey aften reach the summit  
Whaur Virtue sits enthroned as Queen,  
An' Peace an' Honour crown the scene.  
But Jamie, though to say't I'm laith  
An' whisper it below my breath,  
You'll come straucht down, baith soul' an body;  
If you keep on wi beer an toddy."

That angered Jeems,

"God damn your cheek,"

He cried, "It sets you ill to speak!  
For tuppence I was rive your beard  
An' see your horns as siccar ser'ed;  
Rug aff your tail an gar' you squeel  
You auld an ugsome unhung Deil!"  
An' with the words Jeems made a breenge.  
Lord keep me! What a mighty cheenge!  
In less than naetime Nick was aff,  
While up there rase an eldritch laugh,  
And a' the hills and valleys round,  
Rocked wi' a maist uncanny sound.  
"An earthquake;" Jeems cried out in fear,  
"God keeps us a' when Sawtan's near."

The Three Great Lichts Jeems whuppitt out  
Then, slyly keekin' round about,  
Drapped on his knees, an' breathed this prayer  
Owre Bible, Compases an' Square:  
"Though I may be the warst o' men,  
Lord! save me frae auld Nickie Ben!  
It's true afore him I was brave  
But I'll be moderate wi' the lave,  
Take nae mair liquor to excess  
But steively tyle the little press,  
An' be mair eident wi' the tools,  
Which mind us o' the Golden Rules  
That Temperance, Fortitude, an' Truth  
Improve the mind, subdue the drouth,  
An' daily thank You for each blessin'  
As lang's I'm spared to be a Mason."