

THE MOST SACRED OF NUMBERS.

A brother wrote us sometime ago asking an explanation of the number "Three," and we give the following, from the "Encyclopædia of Freemasonry," for his benefit, and others of our readers whom it may interest:—

"Everywhere among the ancients the number three was deemed the most sacred of numbers. A reverence for its mystical virtues is to be found even among the Chinese, who say that numbers begin at one and are made perfect at three, and hence they denote the multiplicity of any object by repeating the character which stands for it three times. In the philosophy of Plato, it was the image of the Supreme Being, because it includes in itself the properties of the two first numbers, and because, as Aristotle says, it contains within itself a beginning, a middle, and an end. The Pythagoreans called it perfect harmony. So sacred was this number deemed by the ancients, that we find it designating some of the attributes of almost all the gods. The thunderbolt of Jove was three-forked; the sceptre of Neptune was a trident; Cerberus, the dog of Pluto, was three-headed; there were three Fates and three Furies; the sun had three names, Apollo, Sol, and Liber; and the moon three also, Diana, Luna, and Hecate. In all incantations, three was a favorite number, for, as Virgil says, 'numero Deus impari gaudet,' God delights in an odd number. A triple cord was used, each cord of three different colors, white, red, and black; and a small image of the subject of the charm was carried thrice around the altar, as we see in Virgil's eighth eclogue:—

'Terna tibi hæc primum, triplici diversa colore,
Licia circummodo, terque hanc altaria circum
Effigiem duco.'

3. c.,

'First I surround thee with these three pieces of list, and I carry thy image three times round the altars.'

"The Druids paid no less respect to this sacred number. Throughout their whole system, a reverence is constantly made to its influence; and so far did their veneration for it extend, that even their sacred poetry was composed in triads.

"In all the mysteries, from Egypt to Scandinavia, we find a sacred regard for the number three. In the rites of Mithras, the Emphyrean was said to be supported by three intelligences, Ormuzd, Mithra, and Mithras. In the rites of Hindustan, there was the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva. It was, in short, a general character of the mysteries to have three principal officers and three grades of initiation.

"In Freemasonry, the ternary is the most sacred of all the mystical numbers. Beginning with the old axiom of the Roman Artificers, that *tres faciunt collegium*, or it requires three to make a college, they have established the rule that not less than three shall congregate to form a lodge. Then in all the rites, whatever may be the number of superimposed grades, there lie at the basis the three symbolic degrees. There are in all the degrees three principal officers, three supports, three greater and three lesser lights, three movable and three immovable jewels, three principal tenets, three working-tools of a Fellow Craft, three principal orders of architecture, three chief human senses, three Ancient Grand Masters. In fact, everywhere in the system the number three is presented as a prominent symbol. So much is this the case, that all the other mystical numbers depend upon it, for each is a multiple of three, its square or its cube, or derived from them. Thus, 9, 27, 81, are formed by the multiplication of three, as $3 \times 3 = 9$, and $3^2 \times 3 = 27$, and $3^3 \times 3^2 = 81$.

"But in nothing is the Masonic signification of the ternary made more interesting than in its connection with the sacred delta, the symbol of Deity."