

aware of the fact that in many of the so-called "higher degrees" (higher in what? certainly not in appreciation of the Masonic cardinal principles of secrecy and silence) it is customary to have written or printed rituals, but the measure of the distance of their removal from Freemasonry is found in these very printed rituals. The quotation we have made has reference to Blue Lodges in New South Wales, and the Grand Secretary of England appears to be referred to as sending a printed ritual for use in the Australian Lodges. This a peep-hole which needs to be closed. There can be no safety, no secrecy, no silence, no Masonry, where a printed ritual is used.—*Philadelphia Keystone*.

[The *Keystone* is mistaken. It was the Grand Secretary of New South Wales, not of England.—Ed.]

THE ANCIENT GUILD OF BHISTIS.

Does any one know that a fraternity exists in India under vows of brotherly love, secrecy and universal benevolence, savouring much of Freemasonry, quite entitled to the above designation?

It must have been remarked by all who live in India that the bhisti or water-carrier everywhere is distinguished by a coarse red cloth tied round his waist. His capacity, however, is so humble that I do not think many have troubled themselves to ascertain anything about his business or antecedents. After a life-long residence in India the writer, though always much interested in the manners and customs of the people, has only just discovered that this red cloth, besides its utility as a protection against wet, is the sacred insignia of a very large and liberal fraternity, inhabiting the whole of India, and willing to accept within what they consider a holy brotherhood all classes of people that will take the vows of their humble guild and credit its traditions.

The subject in this very illiberal and bigoted country, and at the present time

when the insociability of the different classes of the inhabitants is on the tapis, is one that should be of special interest, as illustrating the possibility of combination in India without regard to creed, and particularly to Freemasons, who, I believe, have already traced a Craft in some respects similar to their own existing in Afghanistan.

The burden of a very old English song is—

“And I hope that his soul in heaven may
dwell,
The first who found out the leather
bottell.”

and I suspect that the use of skin and leather bags as receptacles for liquids may be traced to the most primitive times with all people. I remark this, as it leads me to believe that the mus-suk or leather bag of the bhisti was known in India, as leather bags for irrigation and huge raw hide bottles for keeping *ghi* certainly were, long before the advent of the Mahomedans, and that the guild has a Hindu and far more ancient origin than the rather prejudiced brotherhood of the present day, chiefly Mahomedans, assigns to it.

The bhisti of the present day says that he is a follower of the great Khwaja Khidir, a prophet now in heaven, placed in special charge over all the waters of the earth, and that his apron is the archetype of the red cloth now worn round the loins by bhistis generally. Who this gentleman was historically I leave to those to discover who have more leisure than myself. It may be useful to note that there is a place in Calcutta called Kidderpore. Certain it is that the investiture of the *longi* or apron is a ceremony carried out in the presence of a meeting of the brotherhood and after the aspirant has been tutored by a *guru* or preceptor in the mystic observances and identifying questions and answers of the Craft and has taken vows. One of these vows I know to be never to refuse a drink of water to any soul that asks for it, never to demand payment but to beg it if in need, and not to press if refused; never to refuse a drink to the thirsty,