

READING OF THE SCRIPTURES.

By an ancient usage of the Craft, the Book of the Law is always spread open in the Lodge. There is in this, as in everything else that is Masonic, an appropriate symbolism. The Book of the Law is the Great Light of Masonry. To close it would be to intercept the rays of divine light which emanate from it, and hence it is spread open, to indicate that the Lodge is not in darkness, but under the influence of its illuminating power. Masons in this respect obey the suggestion of the Divine Founder of the Christian religion—"neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house." A closed book, a sealed book, indicates that its contents are secret; and a book or roll folded up was the symbol, says Wemyss, of a law abrogated, or of a thing of no further use. Hence, as the reverse of all this, the Book of the Law is opened in our Lodges, to teach us that its contents are to be studied, that the law which it inculcates is still in force, and is to be "the rule and guide of our conduct."

But the Book of the Law is not opened at random. In each degree there are appropriate passages, whose allusion to the design of the degree, or to some part of its ritual, makes it expedient that the book should be opened with those passages.

Masonic usage has not always been consistent, nor is it now universal in relation to what particular passages shall be unfolded in each degree. The custom in this country, at least since the publication of Webb's Monitor, has been very uniform, and is as follows:

In the first degree the Bible is opened at Psalm cxxxiii, an eloquent description of the beauty of brotherly love, and hence most appropriate as the illustration of a society whose existence is dependent on that noble principle. In the second degree the passage adopted is Amos vii, 7, 8, in which the allusion is evidently to the plumb-line, an important emblem of that degree. In the third degree the Bible is opened at Ecclesiastes xii, 1-7, in which the description of old age and death is appropriately applied to the sacred object of this degree.

But, as has been said, the choice of these passages have been selected, but always with great appropriateness, as may be seen from the following brief sketch.

Formerly the Book of the Law was opened in the first degree at the 22d chapter of Genesis, which gives an account of Abraham's intended sacrifice of Isaac. As this event constituted the *first grand offering*, commemorated by our ancient brethren, by which the ground floor of the Apprentice's Lodge was consecrated, it seems to have been very appropriately selected as the passage for this degree. That part of the 28th chapter of Genesis which records the vision of Jacob's ladder was also, with equal appositeness, selected as the passage for the first degree.

The following passage from I Kings, vi, 8, was, during one part of the last century, used in the second degree:

"The door of the middle chamber was in the right side of the house, and they went up with winding stairs into the middle chamber, and out of the middle into the third."

The appositeness of this passage to the Fellow-Crafts will hardly be disputed.

At another time the following passage from II Chronicles, iii, 17, was