self liable to shocking tortures and mutilations should he prove faithless. His throat may be cut, his tongue torn out, his left breast laid open, his body severed in two and bowels burned to ashes, his head cut off, his right hand cut off and slung over his left shoulder to wither and die.

Perhaps in his schooldays he made use of such expressions as “cut my throat and hope to die”, accompanied by even the appropriate gesture, thus unwittingly giving the Penal sign of the first degree. But if he was brought up in a Christian household he would surely have had misgivings over swearing these words on his knees with one hand resting on the Bible.

It will be noticed, too, that although the first degree obligation is solely concerned with secrecy, the second and third degree and Royal Arch oaths include also certain moral principles and loyalties, the infringement of which likewise carries the death penalty. The Candidate swears that he will accept a punishment of being severed in two, for instance, if he fails boldly to repel the slanderer of a brother-Mason’s good name, or if the position of his daily supplications does not remind him of a brother’s need. “All these points,” he declares, “I solemnly swear to observe, without evasion, equivocation, or mental reservation of any kind, under no less a penalty ……”

It must be admitted that on his initiation he is treated more reasonably. An alternative penalty has been inserted (probably a later interpolation) branding him as “void of all moral worth” and so on, but in England and Scotland, at least, this appears only in the Entered Apprentice obligation; to assume that it applies equally to the penalties in other degrees when it is nowhere hinted that it does so savours of ‘equivocation.’ The Irish workings are also more reasonable; they are sworn in each degree “bearing in mind the ancient penalty ……” and binding myself under the real penalty of being branded deservedly as a wretch,” etc. This gets over some of the difficulties. But how can the Scot and the Englishman get over theirs?

The problem bristles with dilemmas.