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|  **Jim Tresner, 33° Grand Cross**http://204.3.136.66/web/journal-files/Issues/may-jun05/31.jpgOriginal oil painting by Bro. Robert H. White, 32°The regalia of the Thirty-first Degree is almost stark in its simplicity. The apron (see facing page) is white lambskin lined and bordered in white. On the flap is a Teutonic cross[\*](http://204.3.136.66/web/journal-files/Issues/may-jun05/31st.html#note) embroidered in silver and black. The jewel is a silver Teutonic cross and is worn around the neck hanging from a white ribbon. The color of the degree is white. Embroidered in gold on the point is an equilateral triangle, emitting golden rays and containing the numerals *XXXI*.White, representing purity of intent and motive, has been seen before in the regalia of the Scottish Rite, but here it becomes the predominant theme. Clearly, we are dealing with transcendence or at least with preparation for transcendence. In the great myth cycles, the last event which befalls the hero, just prior to the culmination of his quest, is an event of purification and preparation. The Thirty-first Degree fulfills that role.In previous degrees we have been warned against unconscious arrogance. We have been cautioned about being “wise in our own conceit.” We have been told that too many Masons profess their obligations with their mouths but do not hold them in their hearts nor practice them in their lives. We have been cautioned that we never will become Masons just by learning the words of the ritual, even if we memorize every single word of it, for Masonry involves a change in the heart.And so now comes the testing set in context of the Egyptian Court of the Dead. As mentioned before, this degree involves asking deep and searching questions. It is not intended that the candidate be able to profess a spotless purity of life, although that sometimes happens. I was in the audience during one performance of the Thirty-first Degree when, about two-thirds of the way through the questions, the candidate had professed a life of such complete and scintillating innocence and purity that the actor questioning him stopped and said, “My Brother, you’re wasting your time becoming a Mason. Instead, you should apply directly for sainthood.”

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| http://204.3.136.66/web/journal-files/Issues/may-jun05/31-court.jpg |
| **Depiction of the Eqyptian Court of the Dead** |

 On the other hand, I was also present when a candidate had admitted to a life stained by the deepest of faults. All of us present were becoming most uncomfortable. When the point in the ritual was reached where he was asked if there were anything else he wished to say in mitigation or palliation of his answers, he stammered out, “Well, you see, I’m a used car salesman.” It brought down the house. Easily 15 minutes passed before everyone could stop laughing and regain enough self-control so that the degree could continue. The actor who had asked the questions laughed so hard that he wept into his handkerchief and had to leave the stage. When he came back, the degree started again, and his first words were, “That’s all right, Brother, we understand.” It was perfectly sincere, but it brought down the house again.The purpose of the degree is not the selection of saints. The purpose is to make each person realize just how much latitude he gives himself and how much self-deception he may practice. There is a fundamental conflict in the line, “I am a charitable man; get off the street you dirty beggar,” but it can be typical of our thinking.After the candidate has experienced this, after he understands he is often inconsistent, he hears the voices of the sages explaining the ideas of justice and fairness which come from equilibrium and balance. If he understands the degree, the candidate begins to discover that only through balance can he find wisdom.http://204.3.136.66/web/journal-files/Issues/mar-apr05/30-cross.jpg**\*The Teutonic Cross may be thought of as a Greek Cross with a short bar at the end of each arm. Another way of saying it is to say that a Teutonic Cross is a Greek Cross Potent. (Potent, in the language of heraldry, means that the arms terminate with a bar. It is not the same thing as a crosslet, for a crosslet is set in a short distance from the end of the arm.) In the Scottish Rite, this cross forms the jewel or symbol of several of the higher Degrees. But in the jewels and emblems of some Degrees, a second Teutonic Cross, double potent (with two crossbars at the end of the arms) is added to, i.e. charged, upon the first cross. And an escutcheon (shield-shaped plate) with a design is surcharged upon the second cross. In the case of the example given of the 30° (shown right), the device has the initials *J.B.M.* for Jacobus Burgundus Moliensis (Jacques DeMolay).**  |

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