

INTRODUCTION TO FREEMASONRY

The Fellowcraft Degree

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The Wardens

Wardens are found in all bodies of Masonry, in all rites, in all countries.

Its derivation gives the meaning of the word. It comes from the Saxon weardian, to guard, to watch. In France the second and third officers are premier and second Surveillant; in Germany erste and zwite Aufseher; in Spain primer and segundo Vigilante; in Italy primo and secondo Sorvegliante, all the words meaning one who overlooks, watches, keeps ward, observes.

Whether the title came from the provision of the old rituals that the Wardens sit beside the two pillars in the porch of the temple to oversee or watch, the Senior Warden the Fellowcrafts and the Junior Warden the Apprentices, or whether the old rituals were developed from the custom of the Middle Ages Guilds having Wardens (watchers) is a moot question.

In the French Rite and the Scottish Rite both Wardens sit in the West near the columns. In the Blue Lodge the symbolism is somewhat impaired by the Junior Warden sitting in the South, but is strengthened by giving each Warden, as an emblem of authority, a replica of the column beneath the shade of which he once sat. The column of the Senior Warden is erect, that of the Junior Warden on its side, while the lodge is at labour. During refreshment the Senior Warden's column is laid prostrate while that of the Junior Warden is erected, so that by a glance at either South or West the Craft may know at all times whether the lodge is at labour or refreshment.

The government of the Craft by a Master and two Wardens cannot be too strongly emphasized. It is not only the right but the duty of the Senior Warden to assist the Worshipful Master in opening and governing his lodge. When he uses it to enforce orders, his setting maul or gavel is to be respected; he has a proper officer to carry his messages to the Junior Warden or elsewhere; under the Master he is responsible for the conduct of the lodge while at labour.

The Junior Warden's duties are less important; he observes the time and calls the lodge from labour to refreshment and refreshment to labour in due season at the orders of the Master. It is his duty to see that "none of the Craft convert the purposes of refreshment into intemperance and excess" which doubtless has a bibulous derivation, coming from days when refreshment meant wine. If we no longer drink wine at lodge, we still have reason for this charge upon the Junior Warden, since it is his unpleasant duty, when ordered by the Master or Grand Master, because he supervises the conduct of the Craft at refreshment, to prefer charges against those suspected of Masonic misconduct.

Only Wardens (or Past Masters) may be elected Master. This requirement (which has certain exceptions, as in the formation of a new lodge) is very old. The fourth of the Old Charges reads:

No brother can be a Warden until he has passed the part of a Fellowcraft; [ix] nor a Master, until he has acted as Warden; nor Grand Warden, until he has been Master of a Lodge; nor Grand Master, unless he has been a Fellowcraft before his election.

The Warden's is a high and exalted office; his duties are many, his responsibilities great; his powers only exceeded by those of the Master.

The Number Five

Five has always been a sacred and mystical number; Pythagoras made of it a symbol of life, since it rejected unity by the addition of the first even and the first odd number. It was therefore symbolic of happiness and misery, birth and death, order and disorder – in other words, life as it was lived. Egypt knew five minor planets, five elements, five elementary powers. The Greeks had four elements and added ether, the unknown, making a cosmos of five.

Five is peculiarly the number of the Fellowcraft's Degree; it represents the central group of the three which form the stairs; it refers to the five orders of architecture; five are required to hold a Fellowcraft's Lodge; there are five human senses; geometry is the fifth science, and so on.

In the Winding Stairs the number five represents first the five orders of architecture.

Architecture

Here for the first time the initiate is introduced to the science of building as a whole. He has been presented with working tools; he has had explained the rough and perfect ashlar, he has heard of the house not made with hands; he knows something of the building of the Temple. Now he is taught of architecture as a science; its beginnings are laid before him; he is shown how the Greeks commenced and the Romans added to the kinds of architecture; he learns of the beautiful, perfect and complete whole which is a well- designed, well-constructed building.

Here is symbolism in quantity! And here indeed the Fellowcraft gets a glimpse of all that Freemasonry may mean to a man, for just as the Freemasons of old were the builders of the cathedrals and the temples for the worship of the Most High, so is the Speculative Freemason pledged to the building of his spiritual temple.

Temples are built stone by stone, a little at a time. Each stone must be hewn from the solid rock of the quarry. Then it must be laid out and chipped with the gavel until it is a perfect ashlar. Finally, it must be set in place with the tempered mortar which will bind. But before any stone may be placed, a plan must come into existence; the architect must plan his part. As the Fellowcraft hears in the degree:

A survey of nature, and the observation of her beautiful proportions, first induced man to imitate the divine plan, and to study symmetry and order. This gave rise to society, and birth to every useful art. The architect began to design, and the plans which he laid down, improved by time and experience, have led to the production of works which are the admiration of every age.

So must the Fellowcraft, studying the orders of architecture by which he will erect his spiritual temple, design the structure before he commences to build.

There are five orders of architecture, not one. There are many plans on which a man may build a life, not one only. Freemasonry does not attempt to distinguish as between the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian as to beauty or desirability. She does suggest that the Tuscan, plainer than the Doric, and the Composite, more ornamental though not more beautiful than the Corinthian, are less revered than the ancient and original orders. Freemasonry makes no attempt to influence the Fellowcraft as to which order of life building he shall choose. He may elect the physical, the mental, the spiritual. Or he may choose the sacrificial – "plainer than the Doric" or the ornamental, which is "not more beautiful than the Corinthian." Freemasonry is concerned less with what order of spiritual architecture a Fellowcraft chooses by which to build than that he does choose one; that he build not aimlessly. He is bidden to study symmetry and order.

Architecture is perhaps the most beautiful and expressive of all the arts. Painting and sculpture, noble though they are, lack the utility of architecture and strive to interpret nature rather than to originate. Architecture is not hampered by the necessity of reproducing something already in existence. It may raise its spires untrammelled by any nature model; it may fling its arches gloriously across a nave and transept with no similitude in nature to hamper by suggestion. If his genius be great enough, the architect may tell in his structure truths which may not be put in words, inspire by glories not sung in the divinest harmonies.

So may the builder of his own house not made with hands, if he choose aright his plan of life and hew to the line of his plan. So, indeed, have done all those great men who have led the world; the prophets of old, Pythagoras, Confucius, Buddha, Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe, Washington, Lincoln ...

The Five Senses

If the Fellowcraft, climbing his three, five, and seven steps to a Middle Chamber of unknown proportions, containing an unknown wage, is overweighted with the emphasis put upon the spiritual side of life, he may here be comforted.

Freemasonry is not an ascetic organization. It recognizes that the physical is as much a part of normal life as the mental and spiritual upon which so much emphasis is put.

The Fellowcraft Degree is a glorification of education, the gaining of knowledge, the study of the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences and all that they connote. Therefore it is wholly logical that the degree should make special reference to the five means by which man has acquired all his knowledge; aye, by which he will ever acquire any knowledge.

All learning is sense-bound. Inspiring examples have been given the world by unfortunates deprived of one or more senses. Blind men often make as great a success as those who see; deaf men often overcome the handicap until it appears nonexistent. Helen Keller is blind, deaf, and was dumb as well; all that she has accomplished – and it would be a great accomplishment with all five senses – has been done through feeling and tasting and smelling.

But take away all five senses and a man is no more a man; perhaps his mind is no more a mind. With no contact whatever with the material world he can learn nothing of it. As man reaches up through the material to the spiritual, he could learn nothing of ethics without contact with the physical.

If there are limits beyond which human investigations and explorations into the unknown may not go, it is because of the limitations of the five senses. Not even the extension of those senses by the marvelously sensitive instruments of science may overcome, in the last analysis, their limits.

Some objects are smaller than any rays we know except X-rays. If it were possible to construct a microscope powerful enough to see an atom, the only light by which it could be seen would be X-rays. But the very X-rays which would be necessary to see it would destroy the atom as soon as they struck it. In our present knowledge, then, to see the atom is beyond the power of human senses. If anything is beyond the power of eyes, even if aided by the greatest magnification, then there must be truths beyond the power of touch and taste and smell and hearing, regardless of the magnification science may provide.

Except for one factor! Brute beasts hear, see, feel, smell, and taste, as do we. But they garner no facts of science, win no truths, formulate no laws of nature through these senses. More than the five senses are necessary to perceive the relation between thing and thing, and life and life. That factor is the perception, the mind, the soul or spirit, if you will, which differentiates man from all other living beings.

If the Fellowcraft's five steps, then, seem to glorify the five senses of human nature, it is because Freemasonry is a well-rounded scheme of life and living which recognizes the physical as well as the mental life of men and knows that only through the physical do we perceive the spiritual. It is in this sense, not as a simple lesson in physiology, that we are to receive the teachings of the five steps by which we rise above the ground floor of the Temple to that last flight of seven steps which are typical of knowledge.