

# **INTRODUCTION TO FREEMASONRY**

## **The Fellowcraft Degree**

**By Carl H. Claudy**

### **Table of Contents**

[The Number Seven](#)

[The Seven Liberal Arts And Sciences](#)

[The Stairs Wind](#)

[Letter "G"](#)

## *Letter "G"*

Its first reference is to the first and noblest of the sciences, geometry. Geometry, the fifth of the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences, and astronomy, the seventh science, are so much a part of each other that it is difficult to consider them separately; indeed, the ritual of the letter "G" is as much concerned with the study of the heavens as of the science of measurement alone. We hear:

By it we discover the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of the Grand Artificer of the Universe and view with delight the wonderful proportions of this vast machine. By it we discover how the planets move in their respective orbits and demonstrate their various revolutions.... Numberless worlds are around us, all framed by the same Divine Artist, which roll through the vast expanse, controlled by the same unerring law.

It is difficult to visualize the vital importance of the heavens to early men. We can hardly conceive of their terror of the eclipse and the comet or sense their veneration for the Sun and his bride, the Moon. We are too well educated. We know too much about "the proportions which connect this vast machine." The astronomer has pushed back the frontiers of his science beyond the comprehension of most of us; the questions which occur as a result of unaided visual observations have all been answered. We have substituted facts for fancies regarding the sun, the moon, the solar system, the comet, and the eclipse.

Pike [<sup>xi</sup>] says:

We cannot, even in the remotest degree, feel, though we may partially and imperfectly imagine, how those great, primitive, simple-hearted children of Nature felt in regard to the Starry Hosts, there upon the slopes of the Himalayas, on the Chaldean plains, in the Persian and Median deserts, and upon the banks of the great, strange river, the Nile. To them the Universe was alive – instinct with forces and powers, mysterious and beyond their comprehension. To them it was no machine, no great system of clockwork; but a great live creature, in sympathy with or inimical to man. To them, all was mystery and a miracle, and the stars flashing overhead spoke to their hearts almost in an audible language. Jupiter, with its kingly splendours, was the emperor of the starry legions. Venus looked lovingly on the earth and blessed it; Mars with his crimson fires threatened war and misfortune; and Saturn, cold and grave, chilled and repelled them. The ever-changing Moon, faithful companion of the Sun, was a constant miracle and wonder; the Sun himself the visible emblem of the creative and generative power. To them the earth was a great plain, over which the sun, the moon and the planets revolved, its servants, framed to give it light. Of the stars, some were beneficent existences that brought with them springtime and fruits and flowers – some, faithful sentinels, advising them of coming inundation, of the season of storm and of deadly winds; some heralds of evil, which, steadily foretelling, they seemed to cause. To them the eclipses were portents of evil, and their causes hidden in mystery, and supernatural. The regular returns of the stars, the comings of Arcturus, Orion, Sirius, the Pleiades, and Aldebaran, and the journeyings of the Sun, were voluntary and not mechanical to them. What wonder that astronomy became to them the most important of sciences; that those who learned it became rulers; and that vast edifices, the Pyramids, the tower or temple of Bel, and other like erections elsewhere in the East, were builded for astronomical purposes? – and what wonder that, in their great childlike simplicity,

they worshiped Light, the Sun, the Planets, and the Stars, and personified them, and eagerly believed in the histories invented for them; in that age when the capacity for belief was infinite; as indeed, if we but reflect, it still is and ever will be?

Anglo-Saxons usually consider history as their history; science as their science; religion as their religion. This somewhat naive viewpoint is hardly substantiated by a less egoistic survey of knowledge. Columbus' sailors believed they would fall off the edge of a flat world, yet Pythagoras knew the earth to be a ball. The ecliptic was known before Solomon's Temple was built; the Chinese predicted eclipses long, long before the Europeans of the Middle Ages regarded them as portents of doom! Astronomical lore in Freemasonry is very old. The foundations of our degrees are far more ancient than we can prove by documentary evidence. It is surely not stretching credulity to believe that the study which antedates geometry must have been impressed on our Order, its ceremonies and its symbols, long before Preston and Webb worked their ingenious revolutions in our rituals and gave us the system of degrees we use to-day in one form or another.

The astronomical references in our degrees begin with the points of the compass; East, West, and South, and the place of darkness, the North. We are taught why the North is a place of darkness by the position of Solomon's Temple with reference to the ecliptic, a most important astronomical conception. The sun is the Past Master's own symbol; our Masters rule their lodges – or are supposed to! – with the same regularity with which the sun rules the day and the moon governs the night. Our explanation of our Lesser Lights is obviously an adaptation of a concept which dates back to the earliest of religions; specifically to the Egyptian Isis, Osiris, and Horus, represented by the sun, moon, and Mercury.

In circumambulation about the altar we traverse our lodges from East to West by way of the South as did the sun worshipers who thus imitated the daily passage of their deity through the heavens.

Measures of time are astronomical. Days and nights were before man and consequently before astronomy but hours and minutes are inventions of the mind, depending upon the astronomical observation of the sun at meridian to determine noon and consequently all other periods of time. The Middle Chamber work gives to geometry the premier place as a means by which the astronomer may fix the duration of time and seasons, years and cycles.

Observing that the sun rose and set our ancient brethren easily determined East and West, although as the sun rises and sets through a variation of 47 degrees north and south during a six months' period the determination was not exact.

The earliest Chaldean star gazers, progenitors of the astronomers of later ages, saw that the apparently revolving heavens pivoted on a point nearly coincident with a certain star. We know that the true north diverges from the North Star one and a half degrees, but their observations were sufficiently accurate to determine a North – and consequently East, West, and South.

A curious derivation of a Masonic symbol from the heavens is that universally associated with the Stewards, the cornucopia.

According to the mythology of the Greeks which goes back to the very dawn of civilization, the god Zeus was nourished in infancy from the milk of the goat, Amalthea. In gratitude the god placed Amalthea forever in the heavens as a constellation, but first he

gave one of Amalthea's horns to his nurses with the assurance that it would forever pour for them whatever they desired,

The horn of plenty, or the cornucopia, is thus a symbol of abundance. The goat from which it came may be found by the curious among the constellations under the name of Capricorn. The Tropic of Capricorn of our school days is the southern limit of the swing of the sun on the path which marks the ecliptic, on which the earth dips first its north, then its south pole toward our luminary. Hence there is a connection, not the less direct for being tenuous, between our Stewards, their symbol, the lights in the lodge, the place of darkness, and Solomon's Temple.

Of such curious links and interesting bypaths is the connection of astronomy with geometry and the letter "G," the more beautiful when we see eye to eye with the Psalmist: "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth his handiwork."

## ***The Number Seven***

Most potent of numbers in the ancient religions, the number seven has deep significance. The Pythagoreans called it the perfect number, as made up of three and four, the two perfect figures, triangle and square. It was the virgin number because it cannot be multiplied to produce any number within ten, as can two and two, two and three, and two and four, three and three. Nor can it be produced by the multiplication of any whole numbers.

Our ancient ancestors knew seven planets, seven Pleiades, seven Hyades, and seven lights burned before the Altar of Mithras. The Goths had seven deities: Sun, Moon, Tuisco, Woden, Thor, Friga, and Seatur or Saturn, from which we derive the names of the seven days of our week. In the Gothic mysteries the candidate met with seven obstructions. The ancient Jews swore by seven, because seven witnesses were used to confirm, and seven sacrifices offered to attest truth. The Sabbath is the seventh day; Noah had seven days' notice of the flood; God created the heaven and the earth in six days and rested on the seventh day; the walls of Jericho were encompassed seven times by seven priests bearing seven rams' horns; the Temple was seven years in building, and so on through a thousand references.

It is only necessary to refer to the seven necessary to open an Entered Apprentice's lodge, the seven original officers of a lodge (some now have nine or ten or even more) and the seven steps which complete the Winding Stairs to show that seven is an important number in the Fraternity.

## ***The Seven Liberal Arts And Sciences***

In William Preston's day a liberal education was comprised in the study of grammar, rhetoric and logic, called the trivium, and arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy, called the quadrivium. Preston endeavored to compress into his Middle Chamber lecture enough of these to make at least an outline available to men who might otherwise know nothing of them.

In our day and times grammar and rhetoric are considered of importance, but in a secondary way; logic is more or less swallowed up as a study in the reasoning appropriate to any particular subject; arithmetic, of course, continues its primary importance; but from the standpoint of science, geometry and its offshoots are still the vital sciences of measurement. Music has fallen into the discard as part of a liberal education; it is now one of the arts, not the sciences, and astronomy is so interrelated with physics that it is hard to say where one leaves off and the other begins. As for electricity, chemistry, biology, civics, government, and the physical sciences, they were barely dreamed of in Preston's day.

So it is not actually but symbolically that we are to climb the seven steps. If the author may venture to quote himself: [x]

William Preston, who put so practical an interpretation upon these steps, lived in an age when these did indeed represent all knowledge. But we must not refuse to grow because the ritual has not grown with modern discovery. When we rise by Grammar and Rhetoric, we must consider that they mean not only language, but all methods of communication.

The step of Logic means a knowledge not only of a method of reasoning, but of all reasoning which logicians have accomplished. When we ascend by Arithmetic and Geometry, we must visualize all science; since science is but measurement, in the true mathematical sense, it requires no great stretch of the imagination to read into these two steps all that science may teach. The step denominated Music means not only sweet and harmonious sounds, but all beauty – poetry, art, nature, loveliness of whatever kind. Not to be familiar with the beauty which nature provides is to be, by so much, less a man; to stunt, by so much, a starving soul. As for the seventh step of Astronomy, surely it means not only a study of the solar system and the stars as it did in William Preston's day, but also a study of all that is beyond the earth; of spirit and the world of spirit, of ethics, philosophy, the abstract – of Deity. Preston builded better than he knew; his seven steps are both logical in arrangement and suggestive in their order. The true Fellowcraft will see in them a guide to the making of a man rich in mind and spirit, by which riches only can true brotherhood be practiced.

## *The Stairs Wind*

Finally consider the implications of the winding stairs, as opposed to those which are straight.

The one virtue which most distinguishes man is courage. It requires more courage to face the unknown than the known. A straight stair, a ladder, hides neither secret nor mystery at its top. But the stairs which wind hide each step from the climber; what is just around the corner is unknown. The winding stairs of life lead us to we know not what; for some of us a Middle Chamber of fame and fortune; for others, one of pain and frustration. The Angel of Death may stand with drawn sword on the very next step for any of us.

Yet man climbs.

Man has always climbed; he climbed from a cave man savagery to the dawn of civilization; Lowell's

...brute despair of trampled centuries, Leapt up with one hoarse yell and snapped its bands;  
Groped for its right with horny, callous hands And stared around for God with bloodshot eyes,  
was a climbing from slavery to independence, from the brutish to the spiritual. Through ignorance, darkness, misery, cruelty, wrong, oppression, danger, and despair, man has climbed to enlightenment. Each individual man must climb his little winding stairs through much the same experience as that of the race.

Aye, man climbs because he has courage; because he has faith; because he is a man. So must the Freemason climb. The winding stairs do lead somewhere. There is a Middle Chamber. There are wages of the Fellowcraft to be earned.

So believing, so, unafraid, climbing, the Fellowcraft may hope at the top of his winding stairs to reach a Middle Chamber, and see a new sign in the East ...