

## **THE WINDING STAIRWAY**

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(The following lecture on the second section of the Fellow Craft Degree was submitted to the Board of Custodians of the Grand Lodge of Tennessee, and is being considered by them with a view to its adoption as a part of the text-book of that Grand Body. By the kindness of Brother Howell E- Jackson, 33d Hon., and a member of the Board of Custodians, it is offered to us for publication in *The Builder*, that it may have the wide hearing which it so richly deserves. It is exceedingly well-conceived and wellwritten, and is an admirable discussion not only of one section of one Degree, but a fine treatise on Masonry in general. It is with great pleasure that we present it to our readers, knowing that it will have a responsive hearing.--The Editor.)

The second section of this degree sets forth the scope and aims of Freemasonry. To become familiar with these is the duty and privilege of every Fellow Craft; and although no one can grasp them completely in a few minutes, or even in many hours, nevertheless every brother may derive from this symbolic lecture a fund of valuable information for future study and contemplation.

We view Masonry under two denominations: Operative and Speculative. We work in Speculative Masonry; our Ancient Brethren wrought in both Operative and Speculative. They worked at the building of King Solomon's temple, and many other sacred and Masonic edifices.

By Operative Masonry we allude to a proper application of the useful rules of architecture, whence a structure will derive figure, strength and beauty; by Speculative Masonry we allude to a proper application of those moral and spiritual rules whence our minds and consciences will derive a heavenly strength and beauty.

By Operative Masonry we learn to control the materials and forces of nature, to build by the square, and to maintain a due proportion and just correspondence between all the parts of an edifice; by Speculative Masonry we learn to control the passions, act upon the square, keep a tongue of good report, observe secrecy, practice charity and maintain patriotism. It is so far interwoven with religion as to lay us under obligation to pay that rational homage to the Deity which constitutes at once our duty and our happiness.

Many of the customs and traditions of the Ancient Operative Brethren are followed by Speculative Masons of to-day; and this evening we may with profit imitate

one of the ancient ceremonies. There were employed in the building of King Solomon's temple eighty thousand Fellow Crafts, who were under the supervision of our ancient Grand Master. On the evening of the sixth day, tradition tells us, their work was inspected, and all who were found worthy, by a strict attention to their duties, were invested with certain mystic signs, grips and words, to enable them to work their way into the Middle Chamber of the temple. On the same day, and at the same hour, King Solomon, accompanied by his most trusted officers, repaired to the Middle Chamber to receive them. His Secretary he placed near his person; the Junior Warden he placed at the Southern outer door, and the Senior Warden at the Western inner door, with strict injunctions to suffer none to enter except such as were duly qualified by possessing the mystic signs, grips and words previously agreed upon; so that when they did enter, King Solomon knew them to be faithful workmen, and there remained nothing to do but to pay them their wages and record their names, admonishing them of the reverence due the sacred name of Deity. He then suffered them to depart in peace, until the time should come for the beginning of another week's work.

We are now about to work our way into a place representing the Middle Chamber of King Solomon's temple, and should we succeed, I have no doubt that we shall alike be rewarded as were they. At the beginning of our journey we pass through a long aisle representing the porch of the temple, and between two columns representing the two brazen pillars which King Solomon caused to be set up at the entrance. The pillar the right was called ---- and denotes ----; the one the left was called ---- and denotes----; taken together, they allude to the promise of God to David, "in strength will I establish thine house and kingdom ever."

These pillars were eighteen cubits in height, and were surmounted by capitals five cubits in height. The capitals were ornamented with wreaths of net-work, leaves of lily-work, and chains of pomegranates. The net-work, from the intricate connection of its parts, denotes Unity; the lily, from its extreme whiteness and purity, denotes Peace; the pomegranate, from the exuberance of its seeds, denotes Plenty. To us, as Speculative Masons, they teach important lessons. Plenty, in that though some may possess more than others of this world's goods, yet every man who has health and the ability to labor may have his own plenty; Peace, that here, on the broad level of Brotherly Love, the

high, the low,--the rich, the poor,--meet with one common purpose and one single aim, the exaltation and perpetuation of each other's friendship and each other's love; Unity, being bound together by the indissoluble bond of fellowship in our glorious fraternity.

Passing between these columns, we arrive at the foot of a flight of winding stairs, representing those winding stairs which, the Holy Bible tells us, led from the ground floor to the middle chamber of King Solomon's temple. You stand here, my brother, as a man just starting forth on the journey of life, with the great task before him of self-improvement. The labor required in the faithful performance of this task is great, but the reward is magnificent. The labor is that of gaining self-control, of divesting the mind and conscience of all the vices and superfluities of life, and of developing the body, mind and spirit; the reward is the perfect character, as designed by the Great Architect upon the spiritual, moral and Masonic Trestle Board.

The stairway consists of three divisions. The first explains the great purpose in the labor of life; the second explains the use of one's own self in self-development; the third explains the use of the world, which the Deity has placed around us, in the perfection of our characters.

The first division, consisting of three steps, alludes to the three great lights in Masonry, which have already been explained to you. These steps allude also to the three principal officers of a lodge: the Worshipful Master in ----, the Senior Warden in ----, and the Junior Warden in ----. They allude, further, to the great luminary of the solar system, the sun, as seen from its three principal points of observation. It rises in the east with mild and genial influence, all nature rejoicing at the approach of its beams; with increasing strength it attains its meridian in the south, invigorating all nature with its animating radiance; with declining strength it sets in the west, leaving mankind to rest from his labors. This, my brother, is but a type of the three principal stages in the life of man--infancy, manhood and old age. The first is characterized by a blush of innocence as pure as the tints which gild the eastern portals of the day: the heart rejoices in the unsuspected integrity of its own unblemished virtue: it fears no deceit, for it knows no guile. Manhood succeeds; with increasing strength man attains the meridian of his powers; but when old age comes on, his strength decays; enfeebled by sickness and bodily infirmities he lingers on, until death finally closes his eventful existence. Thrice

happy is he if the setting splendors of a well-spent life gild his departing moments with the gentle tints of hope, and close his short career in peace, harmony, and brotherly love.

So shalt thou live, my brother ! And what if thou withdraw in silence from the living, and no friend take note of thy departure? All that breathe will share thy destiny. The gay will laugh when thou are gone; the solemn brood of care plod on, and each one, as before, will chase his favorite phantom; yet all these shall leave their mirth and their employments, and shall come and make their bed with thee. And as the long train of ages glides away, he that goeth in life's green spring, he that goeth in the full strength of years, and he bowed down by age, shall one by one be gathered to thy side, by those who in their turn shall follow them. Ponder this well, my brother, and "when thy summons comes to join the innumerable caravan which moves to the pale realms of shade, where each shall take his chamber in the silent halls of death, go not like the quarry-slave at night scourged to his dungeon; but, sustained and soothed by an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave like one who wraps the drapery of his couch around him and lies down to pleasant dreams."

You will now take with me these three steps, arriving at the second division of the stairway, which consists of five steps. These allude to the five senses of man: hearing, seeing, feeling, smelling, and tasting. The proper use of these senses, and of the other human faculties, enables us to sustain our lives, ward off dangers, enjoy all the legitimate pleasures, and contribute to the comfort and happiness of others. Their improper use, consisting usually of an over-indulgence, but sometimes of too harsh a self-denial, tends in either case to an impairment of their proper functioning, and hence to an enfeeblement of the entire system. Speculative Masonry warns us, on the one hand, not to degenerate to the level of brutes in seeking only a beastly gratification of the senses; and, on the other hand, not to despise or neglect any faculty, but, using them one and all as a means of self-development, to attain thereby to the fullness of true manhood.

Of these senses three are deemed peculiarly essential among Masons: hearing, seeing, and feeling; for by the ear we hear the ----; by the eye we see the ----, and by the hand we feel ----.

The five steps also allude to the five Orders of Architecture; a knowledge of which was invaluable to our Ancient Operative Brethren. These are the Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, and Composite. Each order is distinguished from the others by the shape of its column, there being great variety in richness of ornamentation. To us as Speculative Masons they teach the important lesson that we should so develop our faculties that each one, in his separate calling, may attain that skill and proficiency which our Operative Brethren displayed in the art of Architecture.

Of these five orders, the Ionic, Doric and Corinthian are most esteemed by Masons. These allude to the ----.

You will now take with me these five steps, arriving at the third division of the stairway, which consists of seven steps. These steps allude to those branches of learning which were anciently called the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences: Grammar, Rhetoric, Logic, Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and Astronomy. You may be familiar with these, my brother, from the experience of every-day life. You may even have studied them in institutions of learning, and have gained a knowledge of their inner secrets and a mastery over their intricate processes. It is not the function of Masonry to expound them to you. It is, however, one of the great purposes of Masonry to teach you the due and proper attitude toward these and all other phases of intellectual activity. Knowledge is of little worth, unless wisdom be coupled with it; and Masonry endeavors to teach man to use his knowledge wisely.

The arts and sciences may be regarded as treasuries of the intellectual wealth of the world. They are filled with a coin which man must needs have in order to purchase his daily bread. More and more, as civilization progresses, does it become impossible for man to perform any labor successfully without systematic thought; and science, my brother, is nothing but systematic thought. Hence Masonry enjoins you, for your own advancement, to pursue with diligence a study of the sciences, and of the arts dependent upon them.

Moreover, it is not merely for your own sake that such study is recommended. It may happen that any man--perhaps you, my brother--may through scientific knowledge make some discovery or invention which will bring untold comforts and blessings to your own posterity and to the whole human race; it may be that through your command of

grammar and rhetoric, some literature, some eloquent oratory, may be given to the world, to guide and elevate all mankind. Hence, for the good you may do to others, Masonry calls upon you to proceed ever forward to the improvement of your mind.

Finally, my brother, for the sake of your duty to the Deity, Masonry commends to you the highest intellectual efforts. Have not the sciences revealed to us many of nature's most intimate secrets, and many of the grandest conceptions of the Universe? Have not the arts enabled us to control and to employ some of the most gigantic forces of nature ? Have not these accomplishments inspired us with reverence for the Creator far beyond that of the untutored savage? And by their very limitations, have not our studies proved to us how insignificant is our knowledge and our power compared with that omniscience and omnipotence which has designed, and now governs, the universe?

It has been said of old, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the firmament declareth the work of his hands," and again, "When our telescope sweeps the midnight sky, we do but think the thoughts of God after Him."

So, my brother, should the sciences and the arts have a three-fold Masonic value to you; to improve yourself, to enable you to help others, and to inspire you with a due reverence for the Deity.

You will now take these seven steps, arriving at the top of our symbolic stairway. From here, my brother, look back, and consider the lesson of life which Masonry would teach you. From the first division of the stairway you learn the great principle which is to give purpose to your life--Brotherly Love. From the second division you learn the second element in Masonic self-improvement: the Manly Development of your Faculties. From the third division you learn the third element: the Illumination of Knowledge with Wisdom.

My brother, is your spirit humble before the tremendous problems of life? Masonry can give help and advancement to the humblest of the humble. Is your spirit ambitious, viewing the splendid opportunities of life? Masonry can offer to the most ambitious a field for inconceivable success and triumph. Broad indeed is this, the field of Masonic activities. With its vast extent backward, to the dim horizon of the past; with its comprehensive sweep around us, to every part of the modern world; with its grand,

alluring avenues to the limitless expanse of the future: embracing the citadels of labor, of science and of art; the heights of philosophy, of morality, of religion; the gardens of charity, of brotherhood, of love; bounded only in breadth by the ever-widening capacities of man, in length by the endless duration of time, in richness by the infinite love of God! The scope of Masonic activities, my brother, is indeed the whole world, which you are summoned to meet with the true and noble spirit of a Mason.

In King Solomon's temple even an unworthy workman might ascend the flight of stairs to the inner door; so you, my brother, though you have ascended, may not be worthy. Yet bear in mind that as the unworthy workman in the temple, not knowing the mystic signs, grips and words, could not pass the door into the Middle Chamber, so you can never pass into the inner chamber of that spiritual and Masonic temple, eternal in the heavens, until you have secured those spiritual signs and tokens which none but a worthy Speculative Mason may obtain.

We are now at a place representing the outer door of the Middle Chamber of King Solomon's temple.