

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE SECOND DEGREE

It seems a misnomer to call this talk "A Journey through the Second Degree" as the Second Degree is itself a journey; in fact it is the Masonic journey. The First represents sunrise birth, beginning the Third represents sunset death, the end; but the Second represents the time between sunrise and sunset, between birth and death, the distance between the beginning and the end, However it is intended to conduct the reader through the Second Degree following the order of the ceremony, touching on its highlights, and adding some Interpretation and explanation. As we make this journey let us keep in mind the main aim and purpose of the Second Degree, which is to Inculcate the importance of developing the intellectual faculty, so that its attainments may lift us to a truer and fuller appreciation of the wonderful works of the Almighty Creator.

In the Second Degree the Lodge is opened on the Square that great Masonic emblem of the Golden Rule, of doing unto others as in Similar cases we would wish that they should do to us, or as we Freemasons put it, of acting on the Square. This is the way of life that Freemasonry teaches, and has ever taught, that is, to harmonise our conduct in this life as to render us acceptable to that Divine Being, from whom all goodness springs. It is thus fitting that the candidate for the Second Degree should gain admission by the assistance of the Square.

In the First Degree the Brethren are asked to take notice that the candidate is about to pass In view before them, but in this Degree the word "*now*" is added -- "*is now* about to pass in view before them" -- reminding us that *now's* the time to remember our Creator; and that *now* is the time to perform; our allotted task while it is yet day. In the Second Degree the sun is always at its meridian.

The predominating number of this degree is five, and so the candidate advances to the East by five steps, as though ascending a winding staircase. The Winding Staircase, to my mind, is the greatest symbol in the Second Degree. However, we will deal with that when we come to the Tracing Board, and then you can judge for yourself.

As the candidate kneels for the obligation, the number five again predominates for in doing so he forms five squares, thus: the first with his r... l...; the second with his l... 1... , the third with his r... h... , the fourth with his l...a... and the fifth with his t... In numerology five is the number of social relations thus identifying it with the Masonic Square and the five points of fellowship, but that of course, belongs to the Third Degree.

In the Secrets we are told: "for it was in this position that Moses prayed fervently to the Almighty ." This alludes to the line when an army of Israelites under the command of Joshua were engaged in battle with the Amalekites. Now, even though they were greatly outnumbered, the Almighty had assured Moses that the Israelites would prevail as long as Moses held his hand in this position as a sign of prayer and a token of the faith of Israel that numbers were of no importance when the Almighty was on their side. This incident is recorded in the Book of Exodus 17: 11-12, where we read: "And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side, and his hands were steady till the going down of the sun,"

The word of the degree is a Hebrew word, the meaning of which is w... e... , and when conjoined with that in the former degree forms the key to God's covenant with Israel as we will readily see, when we repeat the covenant: "in the strength of Jehovah shall the king rejoice, for He will establish the throne of David and his kingdom to his seed forever." This is the real importance of the word; the fact that the Assistant High Priest bore the same name as the southern pillar is incidental, but it did provide our ancient Brethren with a ready means of remembering the name of the Pillar.

There is no account of the dedication of the Temple in the Bible, but that event is amply recorded by the Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, in his work, Jewish Antiquities. In his account we find that Zadok has become the sole High Priest of Israel, whereas in the reign of King David he shared that office with Abiathar. Abiathar, however, was later found guilty of treason by King Solomon for aiding and abetting Adonijah in his abortive attempt to seize the throne. The King could not, of course, put to death anyone who had borne the Ark of the Covenant, but Solomon did banish Abiathar, and that is the last mention of him in the Sacred Volume. Josephus states quite clearly that Zadok, as the

High Priest of Israel, officiated at the dedication of the Temple, but he makes no mention of an assistant high priest. If he had one, and he probably did, that assistant's name could have been the same as the southern pillar, because King David appointed a man by that name as one of his twenty-four section leaders or concourses, as they are called in the Sacred Volume, when he re-organized the priesthood, and it would be from their ranks that we could expect such a promotion to come. It could well be that one of our Masonic legends has preserved a name that history has recorded nowhere else. Our ritual does not refer to the name of Zadok, the High Priest, but only to that of his assistant, who assisted him at the dedication, and only because his name was the same as the southern pillar.

In the South east Charge we are told: "You are now placed in the South-east part (of the Lodge), to mark the progress you have made." This is the fifth time that the word "progress" is heard in this degree. The first time was when it was used by the Tyler, when he reports: "who has been regularly initiated into Freemasonry, and has made such progress" the second time is when those words are repeated by the Inner Guard in his report to the Master; the third time it comes from the Master himself, when he announces: "Your progress in Freemasonry is marked"; and the fourth time it is spoken by the S.W., when he says: "I invest you with the distinguishing badge of a F.C. Freemason to mark the progress". Thus we hear the word "progress" five times in the Second Degree - five is the predominating number of the Degree and progress, of course, is the central theme of this Degree - progress from sunrise to sunset, from birth to death, from beginning to end.

The working tools of an E.A. Freemason are those used to prepare the stone for the hands of the more expert workman, but the working tools of the Second Degree - the Square, the level, and the Plumb Rule -- are the tools of the expert craftsman, the skilled mason responsible for the correct interpretation of the architect's designs, and for their faithful execution in the building. His, therefore, are the most important of all the tools, and the charge in which they are presented to the candidate is probably the most inspiring in all our Masonic ritual. The candidate who really absorbs its philosophy can hardly fail to become a worthy Freemason. Let me now present to you those tools in the reverse order.

The Plumb Rule, giving us the true vertical line, is the emblem of integrity, which embraces the attributes of kindness, moderation, justice and truth, the essential virtues of the just, upright and steadfast man, of whom the Roman poet, Horace, over two thousand years ago:

The man of firm and righteous will;
No rabble clamorous for the wrong;
Nor tyrant's brow, whose frown may kill,
Can shake the power that makes him strong.
Odes 111. 3,1-4

The Level, giving us the true horizontal line, is the emblem of equality, and teaches that all men are equal, inasmuch as they are all subject to the same infirmities, all hastening to the same goal, and all to be judged by the same immutable law, regardless of race, colour, creed or tongue. In this sense the Level is the perfect emblem of brotherhood. Thus, the Plumb Rule gives us the true vertical line, and the Level gives us the true horizontal line; and when the true vertical and the true horizontal meet, they form an angle of ninety degrees, or the fourth part of a circle, which, of course, is the Square. Now we see that the Level and Plumb Rule are complementary to the Square, and understand the reason that these tools are worn by the three principal officers -- the Master and his two Wardens.

And that brings us to the Square, but we have already mentioned it when we dealt with the opening of the Lodge. However, there are two comments that could be added at this juncture.

In the earliest known Masonic catechism there is this question: "How many make a Lodge?" and the answer is given as: "God and the Square, and five or seven right or perfect Masons". This sounds like a riddle, but it is easily explained. "God and the Square": knowing the meaning of the Square, we are immediately reminded of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of man. To love God and our neighbour is to keep all the commandments, which, of course, is what Christ meant when he said "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." And now for the rest of the answer: "with five or seven right or perfect Masons". Five is right and seven is perfect, because "five hold a lodge" and so five is the right number to form a Masonic quorum; and seven is perfect because, as the

First Tracing Board tells us: that is the number of "regularly made Masons, without which number no lodge is perfect".

The second comment is that in the year 1830, when a very ancient bridge was being rebuilt near Limerick in Ireland, the architect found under the foundation-stone an old corroded brass square with this inscription (cited in *The Builders*, p. 56):

"I will strive to live with love and care,
Upon the level and by the square"

In the Final Charge of this Degree we are told that: "as a Craftsman, in our private assemblies, you may offer your sentiments and opinions on such subjects as are regularly introduced in the lecture." To what lecture does this refer, and when may we expect to receive this privilege? This is a question we are all entitled to ask, and there is, of course, an explanation. Our ritual, adopted in 1889, at the time of the union of the four constitutions then operating in this State, is basically the English Emulation Ritual, but with modifications borrowed from the Scottish, Irish, and Victorian rituals then in use. This was done with the object of appeasing the Brethren belonging to the other constitutions; but the added enrichment gained from the inclusion of the gems selected from these other rituals has given us what is generally considered to be the finest Masonic ritual in the world. The lectures mentioned are the Catechetical Lectures which, although part of the Emulation Ritual, were not incorporated in our present ritual, an omission which is to be regretted, as they are not only an essential part of Freemasonry, but also because we are thereby denied a valuable privilege. Our Grand Lodge, however, has copies of these Catechetical Lectures and encourages their use. The "third, last, and grand reason" mentioned in the First Tracing Board is found in these same lectures, and has recently been included in our ritual.

We will deal with just one thing in the Tracing Board, which has been purposely left to the end, and that is the Winding Staircase which, as I have already claimed, is the greatest symbol in the Fellowcraft Degree, its seven steps, the seven liberal arts and sciences -- grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy -- symbolise the ultimate attainment of a F.C. Freemason, starting from the very beginning of man's intellectual progress. Our first intellectual advance is made possible by the development of language, thus enabling us to communicate with our neighbour, and so widen the field of our knowledge, which would otherwise be restricted to our own personal experience.

Grammar is the foundation of language, and so it must be the first step on the intellectual ladder. It is not enough, however, to master the structure of language; we must be able to put it into practice and the art which teaches us to speak copiously and fluently on a subject is rhetoric, and so we move to the second step. Even the most grammatically correct and skilfully delivered language is just an empty senseless flow of words unless it contains logic, and so we continue to rise to the third step.

Having climbed these three steps, we are then equipped to exchange knowledge with our neighbour. The F.C. were paid their wages in specie, that is coin or money, which here is a symbol for knowledge, because knowledge, like money, increases with usage and exchange. This exchange of knowledge enables us to compare -- to compare what we know with what our neighbour knows. The science of comparison is arithmetic; its ciphers and measurements are but the means that it uses; and so arithmetic, the fourth step, symbolises the beginning of knowledge

Our acquisition of knowledge brings us to step number five, the predominating number of this Degree, and there we find geometry, which is established as the basis of our art. Geometry, the science of harmony in space, presides over everything. We find it in the arrangement of a fir cone, in the spiral of a snail shell, in the chaplet of a spider's web, and in the orbit of a planet. It is everywhere, as perfect in the world of atoms as in the world of immensities. The snowflake is a perfect example of the geometry of God: circles, triangles, pentagons, hexagons, and parallelograms, more exact and delicate than the deftest hand could trace. And this Universal Geometry tells us of a Universal Geometrician, whose divine compasses have measured all things, and so we realise that the development of the intellectual faculty is assuredly leading us even to the throne of God.

Then Geometry leads us to the next step, because music is the geometry of sound. Every note in the musical scale is exactly double the wavelength of the corresponding note in the preceding octave, and

each note in a chord is in logarithmic progression. Music moves with measured step and cannot free itself from geometry without dying away in discord. Music is the concord of sweet sounds, and concord is all the law of God. Geometry brought us close to God, but music brings us closer still:

There is music in the sighing of the breeze;
There is music in the gushing of a stream;

There is music in all things, if men have ears;
This Earth is but an echo of the spheres.

Byron. Seven is the number of completion, and on the seventh and uppermost step we find astronomy by which we are taught to read the wisdom, power and goodness of the Grand Geometrician of the Universe in the wonder of the heavens. With the aid of astronomy we may observe the motions of the heavenly bodies; we may measure their distances, and calculate their periods and eclipses; but our finite minds may not even hope to comprehend the magnitude of God's handiwork. In the words of the poet, Dryden:

How can the less the greater comprehend?
Or finite reason reach infinity?

Reach infinity! We cannot even contemplate it. We can, however, extend our researches into the hidden mysteries of nature and science; so let us do just that, and merely contemplate the magnitude of God's handiwork, and see how far our finite mind can extend. For example to travel the enormous distance of 1 million kilometres would be to completely circle the earth 25 times, and if we could maintain a constant speed of 114 kilometres per hour, it would take us the whole year to complete the journey; and yet the speed of light is so great, that it can traverse 1 million kilometres in a fraction over three seconds. If we could travel at this impossible speed for just eight minutes, we would reach the sun, a distance of 154 million kilometres; but to reach the outer edge of our own home galaxy, the Milky Way, we would need to maintain this fantastic speed for 80,000 years. It is quite impossible, of course, for us to comprehend the extent of 80,000 years, having no experience with which to make a comparison; suffice it to say, that just one-tenth of that period would take us back to the year 6017 B.C., before the Nile Valley was settled by the people who would later build the pyramids, the oldest construction in the world. Then, when we consider that this galaxy, whose magnitude is so far beyond our comprehension, is just a tiny speck in the known universe, our finite mind is completely overwhelmed.

And beyond the known universe stretches the vaster unknown, of which we are but dimly aware through our most powerful modern telescopes receiving light that started on its journey before this planet was born. All this vaster than vast universe with its incalculable billions of stars, each many millions of times the size of this earth, moves and revolves in obedience to a great unseen power with a precision that is perfect. No! We can never hope to comprehend; but it is here on the seventh step of the winding staircase that we may really contemplate the wonderful works of the Almighty Creator.

As F.C. Freemasons we are expected to make the liberal arts and sciences our constant study, that we may better be enabled to discharge our duty as Freemasons, and estimate the wonderful works of the Almighty Creator. When we reach the uppermost step of the Winding Staircase, astronomy conducts us through the paths of heavenly science till we stand at the very foot of the throne of God, of which we are as yet granted but the merest glimpse.

The winding staircase leads us up
By steps of four plus three;
Four is of earth and three's divine,
A perfect unity.
First step is Grammar, and beyond
There follow orderly
Six other steps until on high,
We find Astronomy.
And as we climb step after step,
One thing is plain to see;
It is the greatest symbol,
In the Fellowcraft Degree.

We tread its steps one by one, ever onward, ever upward, without moving away from the centre, that point from which we cannot err; with our horizons ever widening, but the way ahead always out of sight. Then we reach the door of the Middle Chamber, which we find open. It is open only because the experience of the climb has trained our mind to see God in His Universe; and so we enter and find the letter "G".

Brethren, it is only by climbing these stairs -- it is only by developing the intellectual faculty -- that we may reach the summit and find the letter "G" in the Middle Chamber. That is to find God in our own heart, and be filled with a consciousness of His infinite wisdom, of His incomprehensible power. His boundless love and mercy, and the awesome eternity of the time and space of His Universe. When we can do this, we have completed our journey through the Second Degree. It is then, and only then, that we can claim to be Fellowcraft Freemasons.