

STUDY OUTLINE No. 10

SPECULATIVE Freemasonry is divided into degrees, or steps, by which the neophyte symbolically ascends from a lower to a higher level of knowledge and consciousness. The Entered Apprentice degree teaches basic morality, and is the foundation on which a Temple of Character is to be erected. The Fellow Craft degree teaches details of mental processes by which the super-structure is to be completed.

In the Entered Apprentice degree we learned to subdue the passions and cultivate the higher emotions and ideals. The main appeal was to our heart and conscience. In the Fellow Craft degree the address will be made to our intellectual faculties. Freemasonry has ever taught the great lesson of maintaining the proper balance between the physical, mental and spiritual nature inherent in every human being. In many, one or more of these triune faculties is not functioning fully or in harmony with the others. Perhaps the cause lies in a failure to have a proper conception of our own nature; and the efficient use of our mental faculties will correct the fault.

While it appears to have been the intention of those who formulated the Fellow Craft degree in its present form to stress the intellectual faculties, it still contains a large amount of symbolism applicable to the heart and conscience. The whole structure of the three degrees is a gradual unfoldment and moral and spiritual development perfectly correlated.

Our symbolism is based on the builders' art. The operative craftsman served seven years as an Entered Apprentice and was then required to produce a masterpiece as a qualification for being passed to the status of journeyman, or Fellow Craft. In Speculative Freemasonry we learn the theoretical use of the elementary tools of character building and we are then directed to apply them in erecting our Temple

of Character. The operative workman must use all his mental faculties in following the designs on the trestle-board, and so must we also use all our mental faculties in the work of building the individual character which is eventually to be a unit in the completed Temple—the Brotherhood of Man.

Too much emphasis cannot be placed on the necessity for proficiency in all that is taught in the Entered Apprentice degree, before any adequate conception may be had of the Fellow Craft degree.

"The Opening of the Second degree presupposes an ability to open up the inner nature and consciousness at a much more advanced stage than is possible to the beginner, who in theory is supposed to undergo a long period of discipline and apprenticeship in the elementary work of self-preparation, and to be able to satisfy certain tests that he has done so, before being qualified for advancement to the Fellow Craft stage of self-building."—(Wilmshurst—118.)

"Nearly every Masonic symbol or ceremony (like all true allegories) has two (sometimes more) significations, one literal, the other symbolical. The literal meaning, usually the more apparent, is often of great interest, frequently affording striking evidences as to the origin and antiquity of Freemasonry. But it is the symbolical or allegorical meaning, usually the more recondite, which appeals to the thoughtful mind.

"Nor is it unfortunate that the more important lessons are somewhat veiled from observation. We do not prize what we obtain easily; it is that for which we have striven hard or paid a big price which we value. If, therefore, from beneath the surface of these familiar ceremonies any of us by our own studies and reflections are enabled to discover and bring to light truths which have laid somewhat hidden, the appreciation of them is keener and the impression produced deeper and more lasting than if they had been open to superficial observation. For this reason many of the greatest lessons of Freemasonry are wisely hidden away as prizes for the studious and the diligent only. The 'mysteries' and the 'secrets' of Freemasonry are not synonymous terms; the mysteries continue such forever to the Mason who will not study and read. Do you feel that Masonry is an idle and frivolous thing, unworthy the attention of serious men? If so, did you ever reflect whether the fault was yours or that of the Institution? Unless you are sure that you know what Freemasonry is and what it teaches and what are its designs, and that you thoroughly understand its methods of teaching, withhold your condemnation till you have made it the subject of a little serious study, because, as observed by an eminent authority, the character of the Institution is 'elevated in everyone's opinion just in proportion to the amount of knowledge that he has acquired of its symbolism, philosophy and history.'—(Street's "Symbolism of the Three Degrees".)

The Three Steps delineated on the Master's Carpet have a most important significance when applied to the three degrees as one complete allegory of human life. The Fellow Craft represents the manhood period, when the activities are the greatest. Here he is preparing for the later period of life, when his ripened mind is full of philosophical reflections. (See Street's Symbolism of the Three Degrees.)

References:

- The Builders (Newton), page 127, Fellow Crafts.
Symbolical Masonry (Haywood), chapter 33, Operative and Speculative.
Philosophy of Masonry—Pound (Wm. Preston).
Speculative Masonry (MacBride), chapter 1, The Mission of Speculative Masonry.
The Meaning of Masonry (Wilmshurst), Intro: The Position and Possibilities of the Masonic Order.
Symbolism of the Three Degrees (Street), pages 97 to 104.
Encyclopedia of Freemasonry (Mackey), articles:
Speculative Masonry
Degrees
Neophite
Apprentice, Entered
Fellow Craft
Builder
Trestle-Board
Plumb-line
Symbolic Degrees
Symbol
Proficiency
Steps
Carpet