

WORCESTERSHIRE MASONIC STUDY CIRCLE

A paper given by:-

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at Moseley Masonic Hall, Kings Heath, Birmingham, on
27th February 1961, entitled -

'THE SECOND DEGREE'

How often does one hear "I would like you to visit my Lodge, but let me see, next month is only a Second Degree so perhaps you would rather come the next month". When I hear this I conclude that the brother has not really studied the Degree and therefore does not understand or appreciate its beautiful symbolism.

In the early days of operative Masonry there were only two degrees; the first or Apprentice, and the second or Fellowcraft or often called fellow of the craft. The origin of these two degrees is too big a subject to detail, but there are a few points I would like to bring to your notice.

The usual period of apprenticeship was 7 years, after which a test was put to the Candidate, and when successful he was then freed from his master and allowed to carry out his trade.

The Five P.....s of F.....p was the manner in which the secrets of a F.C. were given.

A Legend (which now comprises of most of the Third Degree) was incorporated in the two early Degrees - The Temple Rite being the most popular, but there is also evidence of rites based on the Tower of Babel and Noah's Ark.

There is also a theory that the letter G originated from the fact that the chief implement used by the experienced Craftsman was the Elongated or Gibbet Square which was hung below the Blazing Star when the Lodge was opened in the Second Degree. This figure, being similar to the Hebrew Ginel (G) was afterwards used in the name of our present Ritual.

The Second Degree in its present form did not come into being until the second quarter of the 18th Century, and who was responsible for the re-writing and composition of the 2nd Degree can only be guess work. My humble opinion is that it was the work of those two famous Masons Dr. John Theophilus Desaguliers LL.D. F.R.S. and Dr. James Anderson. Just for a moment let us consider their History.

Dr. Desaguliers was the Third Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of England and succeeded George Payne in 1719. He was of French descent and was educated at Christ Church, Oxford, where he took Orders in 1710. That year he became a lecturer in Experimental Philosophy, and in one of his books (published in 1734) he proved himself a prophet for he prophesied the Splitting of the Atom. He continued in active Masonry until his death in 1744.

Dr. James Anderson. A son of a father of the same name (who is recorded as being a member of the Aberdeen Lodge as far back as 1670). Dr. Anderson was educated at Marischal College, Aberdeen, and was licensed as a Minister of the Church of Scotland about 1702, but moved to London in 1709, receiving the Degree of D.D. from Aberdeen University in 1731. There appears to be no record of his Initiation or of his Mother Lodge, but it is recorded that he was a Member of the Horn Lodge. His early Constitutions are well known to most brethren.

It is my humble opinion that these two brethren did much to mould the Masonic Degrees into the present form, or shall I say the Three Degrees, for we all know that the split in the Masonic bodies which took place about the middle of the 18th Century produced quite a change in the Degrees, particularly with the Moderns. I sometimes feel that the Moderns left out of their Ritual quite a number of important features which I consider would greatly assist in making our Second Degree more interesting. I will endeavour to touch on these points later.

The Degrees as we now know them were the result of the work of the Lodge of Reconciliation formed after the Union of the two rival Grand Lodges who revised the 3 Degrees using the best features of the two Rituals.

For many years I gave much thought to the influence behind the early writers of the F.Cs Degree but during the last few years I have been interested in a theory which I am bound to accept especially after a close study of the Second Tracing Board and its symbolism.

Just prior to the formation of the first Grand Lodge John Bunyan had written his famous Pilgrim's Progress and you who have read his works will agree that there are many passages which point to his having a great store of mystic knowledge. The wicket gate at the beginning of the narrow way can be compared with the entrance to our Lodge, the Shining Light to the Light of Masonry. The knock of the pilgrim on the portal and his subsequent admission. In the Pilgrim's Progress there are three marked stages where Christian receives instruction and enlightenment which are preceded by questions from the Guardian of each Portal, the first stage being at the House of the Interpreter, the second being the Palace Beautiful, and the Third the Delectable Mountains. At the house of the Interpreter Christian receives instruction and guidance by words and symbols, after which he proceeds on his way until he is met by The Three Shining Ones who set a mark on his forehead and give him a roll, or certificate telling him to hand it in at the gate of the Celestial City.

After receiving it Christian goes steadily on climbing the "Hill of Difficulty" which is steep and high, and full of temptations and dangers. Does this progress remind us of the Winding Staircase?

At the top of the Hill he sees before him 'The Palace Beautiful', on reaching which he is asked "Whence he came, and whither he was going". The Porter, considering he answer satisfactory, admits him to the Palace Beautiful, suggestive of the Middle Chamber. Here he is received by Discretion, Prudence, Piety and Charity, in the guise of four damsels who arm him from head to foot with weapons of defence. Does not this remind us of the Wages received by our Antient Brethren?

I will not continue with the Progress of the Pilgrim, for as you know that after leaving the Palace Beautiful he arrives at the Valley of Humiliation which leads to the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

His ultimate triumph over all difficulties of course can be likened to our Third Degree.

I often wonder if those two early Brethren together with their vast knowledge of Religious matters were influenced by Bunyan or was Bunyan a Mason, for we know he was a Master of his Craft. He without doubt, emphasises the fact that the path of the Pilgrim was a way of toil and hardship, so does the Winding Staircase point out to the Candidate that his journey to 'Perfection' is a hard and laborious one. I propose now to leave you with these thoughts of the Pilgrim and suggest that a study of Bunyan's works will be of great help to the student of Freemasonry and will be an excellent guide to its symbolism particularly to the second degree.

To fully understand our Second Degree one must make an intense study of its symbolism. For myself, I must say that I have spent much time, and at the same time derived much pleasure, indeed I admit that I have many times changed my ideas of the true meaning of the Degree. I now see it as the Freeing of the Apprentice and his attempt to reach perfection in his particular Craft.

First he is freed of his bonds, and I would here point out that in the Antient Ceremonies the Candidate was taken through a short Freeing Ceremony where he was declared a Free Man and no longer bound.

I often think that the part of the 1st Degree Ceremony where the W.M. refers to the C.T. has very little meaning and that after the Test Questions have been answered, the Candidate might be declared a Free Man and the C.T. removed prior to his being given the P.W. (The Candidate stands before the A. and the W.M. removes the C.T. and declares that it no longer binds him - Rise Free Brother I place the mark of approval on You).

The Pass Word and its meaning. An Ear of Corn to a fall of water seems at first to have little meaning, but we must remember that it is the Symbol of Life itself. To it we owe the development of the doctrine of the Resurrection, for it men have slaved and even died. It is certainly not an empty shibboleth. A single Ear growing on dry rocky soil, nearly choked out of existence by the Sun and Wind. How can it ever survive? It is near a fall of water, and it has only to spread its roots to get sustenance. The Candidate likewise stands alone, just freed, in a world of illusion awaiting the struggle for existence, but deep down in his heart is the unfathomable source of life which will give him strength day by day.

The Candidate's entrance is met by the S. presented to his heart reminding him that he is no longer under the direction of his Teachers but must make his pilgrimage alone, and that whatever befalls him he must always act on the Square.

After proving his proficiency in the former degree the candidate then enters into the most important part of the Degree, or shall we say his life, the winding staircase. The operative candidate is expected to produce a masterpiece in his particular craft, before he is fully admitted a master so the speculative Mason benefitting by the lessons of the first degree makes his pilgrimage to the middle chamber, which is Perfection. Winding and full of dangers and difficulties, sometimes the pilgrim takes little noticeable progress, but at the summit he looks back and realises that he is now a master of his Fate, and captain of his Soul.

The Winding Staircase is indeed the greatest lesson of our Masonic Degrees for it emphasises the progress of the Initiate towards that perfection which is expected of all members of our Order.

The Candidate takes his obligation promising service, secrecy and obedience after which he takes his second step in Masonry with his feet formed in a TAU a symbol of the Diety and an emblem of Life. With the disclosing of the signs he learns that Faithfulness Perseverance and Secrecy are required of him. A perseverance equal to that of Moses, our first Grand Master, who despite the heat and burden of the day kept his arms raised until the setting of the Sun and calling on his friends, so that Joshua and his Armies could overthrow his enemies. In this battle of life which will last till the Setting of the Sun, we must fight on till the sands of time shall cease, and we stand at the Porch of the Great Unknown. This is the lesson of our T.O. Signs.

I propose to refer only to one feature of the Tracing Board - The Two Great Pillars placed at the Porchway or entrance of the Temple. We are told that these were placed there as a memorial to the Children of Israel, of that miraculous Pillar of Fire & Cloud which helped the Children of Israel to escape from their Egyptian bondage. In Antient Lodges (when possible) two Pillars were placed one each side of the entrance to the Lodge. The Candidate knelt and received the benefit of Masonic Prayer and was also invested with his badge between these Pillars. This was meant to remind him that he had God's protection and guidance, and at the same time all the brethren passing between those Pillars entered the Lodge with God's protection and guidance. I wonder why there are so few sets of Pillars in use today. I notice that the Worcester Lodge 280 has 2 such Pillars, but they are now placed one each side of the W.M's Chair. The last occasion those Pillars were used in a Craft Lodge was on the occasion of a visit of a team of Masons from Bristol.

I trust Brethren, that I have been able to help you to appreciate our Crafting Ceremony, but I am sure that there is one question I shall be asked, so I will in advance try to answer it.

'If the 2nd Degree is as important as I make it out to be - what of the 3rd?'

Briefly I will give you my own thoughts.

The Resurrection of the Candidate reminds me that in his decline of years he looks back with satisfaction on his achievements, as the operative Mason looks back on his masterpiece. Let me remind you that it may be likened to the Perfect Ashlar - of true die or square, fit only to be tried

