

## **THE FELLOW CRAFT AND HIS DEGREE**

(Note: The Lodge should have previously been opened in the Second Degree and the Second Degree tracing Board on its easel.)

(Narrator (Brother N.) rises and salutes WM)

Worshipful Master, Brother Wardens and Brethren please be aware that what follows is not necessarily the view of Grand Lodge although I hope it does not vary greatly from it. This presentation is based on the work of Brother Bernard E Jones and his research in the late 1940's. In particular close reference has been made to his excellent book "The Freemasons' Guide and Compendium" first published in 1950 and to which I am very grateful.

(Brother N moves to in front of WM facing E.)

**Brother N.** - Worshipful Master, Where are we?

**WM.** - Brother N., The Lodge is in the Second Degree.

**Brother N.** - How do you know it to be so?

**WM** – It is marked by the position of the Square and Compasses. One point is disclosed, implying that we are now in the midway of Freemasonry, superior to an Entered apprentice, but inferior to that which is to come.

(Brother N turns and addresses Brethren)

Brethren, that is how the Candidate is informed of his progress on sealing his obligation in the Second Degree.

(Brother N returns to his position)

Small wonder then that after the initiation ceremony, that of Passing sometimes seems to be something of an anticlimax, as though you are indeed merely passing between the first and the third degrees. Today the real interest of the degree lies in the explanation of the Second Degree Tracing Board. Such, however, was not always the case. Yes, the Tracing Board does enter into much of the associated masonic symbolism and introduces the Candidate the building of the Temple at Jerusalem by King Solomon. The importance of which becomes apparent in the Third Degree. Here, however, it is intended to encourage the new Fellow Craft to "extend his researches into the hidden mysteries of Nature and Science. There was and still is much more to this Degree as we shall see. What is the reason for the strange method of approach to the East in this Degree? But more of this later.

I have difficulty in considering the Fellow Craft's Degree as an entirely distinct entity. As we have heard from the ritual, none of us can escape the consciousness that the Second Degree is very much a continuation of the First—an extension of it, in fact. We do not know what led up to the separation, or how it was made, and we know only a little more as to what happened to the Second Degree itself when, in the same decade, the Third came to be generally separated. It is obvious, however, that the interest and importance of the Second Degree considerably suffered by its separation from an inferior degree, and later by the shedding of part of its most interesting material to a superior degree.

Before the 18<sup>th</sup> century it seems that there were only two degrees recognised in Craft Freemasonry, those of Entered Apprentice and 'Fellow Craft' or 'Fellow'. In the days before speculative Freemasonry developed, the 'Fellow' was an Apprentice who had served his time as such and been acknowledged as a Craftsman, entitled to practise his trade. In medieval times, when the main, often the only, buildings in stone were commissioned by the Church or by 'great kings, dukes and lords', operative masonry could be a lucrative business, and to be recognized as a 'Fellow' by masons was the passport to a share in that business and a virtually guaranteed income.

So what of the Second Degree, Then and Now?

There is one marked difference between the old operative fellow, or fellow craft, and the speculative Fellow Craft. The operative had taken a big step as a man and as a mason when, from being an entered apprentice he became a fellow, for he was now a fully fledged member of the community and could work as a master whenever opportunity came his way, because he was already of the master's grade. And in speculative masonry, too, early in the eighteenth century, an exact parallel could be drawn, for once there were conferred upon the Apprentice the privileges of the Second Degree he had all the qualification needed to become Master of his lodge and an officer of high rank in the Order. But with the passage of the years this altered.

The 'Antients' emphasized the importance of the masonic grade of Master Mason; they insisted that the Fellow Craft must become a Master Mason before he could qualify to be the Master of a lodge, and that he could not assume that office until he had passed through an esoteric ceremony of Installation, with which qualification he could then rise to any rank in the Order.

In the lodges of the so-called 'Moderns' the Fellow Craft still remained the fully



qualified mason, for Masters and Grand Officers could be drawn from his grade; but with the reconciliation between the two bodies the Fellow Craft finally lost his earlier importance. The ceremony of the Fellow Craft Degree was probably still further depleted in the course of effecting a peaceful compromise between the two bodies, with the consequence that to-day we regard the Fellow Craft as having achieved little more than a midway position in freemasonry, as we know and are told, superior in status to that of an Entered Apprentice, but definitely inferior to that of the Master Mason, to which he hopes shortly to attain. His ceremony has certainly carried further the ideas and philosophies to which he was introduced at his Initiation, but, apart from that, it has been little more than a stepping-stone from the experience of one Initiation to the even richer experience of another yet to come.

There is, however, if one looks into the ritual, still evidence of the significance attaching to the Second Degree in early days.

Let us begin with the Working Tools

**Brother N.** - Worshipful Master May I see the Working Tools

**WM.** – I now call upon Brother A.B who will explain the Working Tools

*(Brothers N, AB, and Deacons gather in usual place for the presentation of The Working Tools)*

*(Brother A.B. Delivers the explanation)*

**Brother N.** -Brother Deacons, Please take the Plumb Rule to the Junior Warden, and the Level to the Senior Warden and compare them with the jewels of that office.

*( Deacons take jewels to SW & JW Brother N goes to the WM.)*

The Fellow Craft's tools, undoubtedly the most important of all the speculative's tools, were a Master's tools, and as you see, they still provide the jewels of the master and his two Wardens respectively. *(Officers show comparison of Tools to Jewel on collar)*

It is to be noted that the tools now associated with the Master Mason's Degree did not come into use until after the union. The stress laid upon the five points of fellowship in the Third Degree has obviously been borrowed from the Second but that is for another occasion. The necessary preparation of the Master Elect for his

high office is conducted (in English lodges) in the Fellow Craft's lodge, and not in the Master Mason's. There can be no doubt, then, that originally the Fellow Craft's Degree was one of supreme importance, and of this, fortunately, there still survive many traces.

**(Deacons return Tools and all return to places)**

Let us now consider the name of the degree. 'The Fellow Craft'

*'Craft'*

'Craft,' one of the medieval words inherited by freemasonry, was originally a common Teutonic word *kraft* K.R.A.F.T meaning 'power' and 'strength.' In England, and in England alone, it developed in the thirteenth century a second meaning, the one which freemasons associate with it—'art,' 'dexterity,' 'skill,' or 'cunning' of hand or mind. The poet Chaucer speaks of "crafty people," meaning skilful, clever, and, sometimes, merely sensible people. (The use of the word 'craft' to mean 'trickery,' 'deceit,' etc., came in course of time, and we are not concerned with it.) 'Craft' came naturally in due course to mean a 'skilled trade' or 'occupation.' Our early seventeenth-century Authorized Version of the Bible, in Acts Chapter 18 telling the story of the Apostle Paul's arrival at Corinth, says that he stayed with a certain family

**Chaplain** - "because he was of the same craft, . . . for by their occupation they were tent makers."

It is easy to see how 'craft' came to mean a trade mystery, a guild, and a brotherhood, or fraternity. The early merchant guilds developed in course of time into craft guilds, and the guild of this kind came to be known as a 'craft,' in which sense the word came down to freemasonry, probably through the London Company of Masons. It is applied particularly to the first three degrees, known as the symbolic degrees.

The craftsman obviously is one who practises a craft. Among freemasons, as we know, he is one who has been passed to the Second Degree. In the old days a mason was 'crafted' by being made a Fellow Craft. In the Lodge of Dunblane, in the year 1720, a Brother was said to be "duly passed from the square to the compass"—that is, from an Entered Apprentice to a Fellow of Craft. There is an old term 'crafts-master'; he was a man highly skilled in his craft, into which, in all likelihood, he was born.



We derive the word 'fellow' from an old Norse word *felage*, meaning 'partnership,' and implying equality and friendly association. Many of the Old Charges use the term 'Fellow', sometimes in the form 'Masters and Fellows.' A 'fellow' in those days was a member of a fraternity, such as a guild. The fellows of a guild laid down their money and assumed obligations jointly with one another. There we have the essence of the word 'fellow.' To-day, with the meaning of 'member of a fraternity or society,' we have 'Fellow of a College.'

English masons might never have known the 'Fellow Craft' but for an importation from Scotland. It is at any rate possible that they saw it for the first time in the *Constitutions* of 1723, when, under the heading "*of Masters, Wardens, Fellows and Apprentices*," the text speaks of an Apprentice being "made a Brother and then a Fellow-Craft in due time," and later states that no Brother can be a warden until he has passed the part of a Fellow Craft, and that the Grand Master is to be a Fellow Craft before his election.

The *Constitutions* used three words all meaning the same thing— Fellow, Craftsman, and Fellow Craft—and by the introduction of the last of these, a Scots term, they transformed the old English 'Fellow' into a 'Fellow Craft,' for, although possibly the English freemason first met the word in 1723, it had in the course of only a couple of years or so given its name to the Second Degree.

**(Brother N goes to the W. Brother AB positions himself at the Tracing Board)**

Let us next turn to the peculiar method of advancing to the east in this degree.

#### *The Winding Staircase and the Middle Chamber*

**WM** - Brother Senior Warden, you will direct the Senior Deacon to instruct the Candidate to advance to the East in due form.

**Senior Warden** – Brother Senior Deacon, it is the WM's command that you instruct the Candidate to advance to the East in due form.

**(Deacon positions brother N. in NE)**

**Senior Deacon** – The method of advancing from West to east in this Degree is by Five steps as if ascending a winding staircase.

Let me stop you there and refer you to the Tracing Board.

**Brother AB** –(at the Tracing Board) At the building of KST an immense number of Ms were employed. They consisted of EAs and FCs. The EAs received a weekly allowance of corn, wine, and oil; the FCs were paid their wages in specie, which they went to receive in the middle chamber of the Temple. They got there by the porchway or entrance on the south side. After our ancient Brethren had entered the porch, they arrived at the foot of the winding staircase which led to the middle chamber

Brother Deacon why have you placed me in the North when Brother AB has just told us we should be in the south?

Here we have encountered an apparent paradox of the Degree

The lecture on the second Tracing Board tells us that in King Solomon's Temple was a winding staircase, which led to the middle chamber in which the Fellow Crafts were paid their wages. Their ascent to the middle chamber was opposed by the Junior Warden who demanded from them certain tokens. We read of this peculiar construction of the Temple in the 1<sup>st</sup> book of Kings Chapter 6

Chaplain -“The door for the middle chamber was in the right side of the house: and they went up with winding stairs into the middle chamber, and out of the middle into the third.”

The Revised Version speaks of chambers (plural) and calls them “middle side-chambers.” There has been argument as to whether the customary tracing-board accurately depicts the winding staircase, as apparently it should spring from the south, whereas they often show it as appearing to spring from the north. In early Continental boards the stations of the three principal officers were marked by three closed doors, East, West, and South, conveying the idea that behind these doors were Inner Guards empowered to admit or refuse admission. The Biblical passage quoted says that the winding staircase is on the right side of the house, and in Chapter 7, the word ‘right’ is seen to have the meaning of ‘south.’ The spectator in Holy Writ is therefore considered as looking towards the East with the South on his right hand, and this is the position illustrated in so many of the Tracing Boards.

But why is there a winding staircase at all? And what is its symbolism?

One possible explanation goes thus:

**Junior Warden** – “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.”

Suffice it to say, we may reasonably impute special significance to Solomon’s choice of a winding staircase to conduct privileged worshippers from the ground floor to the middle chamber.

**Brother A.B. (At the Tracing Board)** – They then passed up the winding staircase, consisting of three, five, seven or more steps.

In some of the American lodges the Candidate is called upon to ascend an actual winding staircase, but this is not necessarily an example of American ‘extra-illustrating,’ because it is quite likely that the idea came from some of the eighteenth-century English lodges. Among the handsome furniture and other articles included in the list of effects of the Loyal Lodge (now No. 251), Barnstaple, are two quite unique pieces—the ‘winding staircase’ and the ‘middle chamber’

The 1<sup>st</sup> piece is a Winding Staircase. (**Brother AB places WS photograph over Tracing Board**) Whilst we in our 2<sup>nd</sup> Degree ritual now advance by five steps, this rises by the full seven steps, in each of which is set the appropriate letter in brass.

**Brother AB (At Tracing Board)** – Seven or more make a perfect Lodge, because K S was seven years and upwards in building, completing and dedicating the T at J to God’s service. They have like wise a further allusion to the seven liberal Arts and Sciences, (**points to each letter in turn**) namely Grammar, Rhetoric, Logic, Arithmetic, Geometry, Music and Astronomy.

With its wreathed strings and handrails it is an excellent example of the craft of the joiner. The stairs rise to a height of 3ft. 1in. and if used in conjunction with the ‘Middle Chamber’ would raise the top of that structure to the height of 12ft. 7in.

**Brother AB (At Tracing Board - places MC photograph over Tracing Board)** – After our ancient Brethren had gained the summit of the winding Staircase, they arrived at the door of the middle chamber.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> piece is a Middle Chamber. This is generally accepted as having been used in connection with the “winding staircase” in the Second Degree, but the symbol in the floor and again in the ceiling suggests its possible use in the Royal Arch. It is a

typical '18th century Temple,' octagonal in plan, measuring 4ft. 7in. across, the total height being 9ft. 6in. The floor, or platform, rises one step and has a chequered pavement radiating from the centre where a letter 'G' is enclosed by the 'Shield of David' within a circle. This feature is reproduced in the ceiling. The dome is constructed in canvas, supported by eight slender pillars of Doric character; the dome is painted with honeysuckle or other flower ornament and surmounted by a large gilt ball as a finial.

I now want move on to an aspect of this degree which leads us into the text and so that I may do so -

**Brother N.** - Worshipful Master Will you please request any Fellow Crafts to retire for a short time

**WM** – I now request all below the degree of a Master Mason to retire from the Lodge for a short time. (Fellow Crafts leave)

To complete our consideration of this Degree we need to look at the link to the next in the person of Tubal Cain

**WM** – “Tubal Cain was the first artificer in metals. The import of the word is worldly possessions. You must be particularly careful to remember this word as without it you cannot gain admission into a Lodge in a superior degree.”

Tubal Cain had a place in the ritual as far back as 1743, but the interpretation put upon his name was not known in masonry until many years later. That interpretation has led to a great deal of controversy, which has revealed many facts, but ends apparently in the agreement that we do not know how the name was derived or what it properly means.

In the Geneva Bible (issued in 1560), in a marginal note, 'tubal' is explained as meaning 'borne,' 'brought,' or 'worldly' and 'cain' as 'possession.' Thus 'Tubal Cain,' by the simple process of putting the two meanings together, is interpreted as 'worldly possession.' There was a fundamental error in this interpretation, for the scholars were assuming that the primeval language was Hebrew, quite a common assumption in olden days, but one which we now know to be untenable. A simpler interpretation would be 'Tubal the Smith,' because the word 'cain' is not a part of his name, but an indication of his Occupation—namely, a smith or artificer. The Authorized Version of the Bible says that Tubal Cain was an instructor of every artificer in brass and *iron*. Scholars to-day, however, say that a more accurate translation than 'instructor' would be 'whetter' or 'sharpener,' and the Revised



Version says that he was the forger of every cutting instrument of brass and iron, and explains in a marginal reference that 'brass' may be 'copper.' Briefly it may be said that Tubal Cain was a blacksmith.

**Brother N.** - Worshipful Master we can now re -admit Fellow Crafts

Finally, let us now look at what I consider used to be the over riding symbol of this Degree but one that has over time lost some of its significance.

**WM** -Brother Junior Warden please stand in order as a Fellow Craft.

**WM** - Brother Junior Warden, in this position, what have you discovered?

**JW** – A sacred Symbol

**WM** - Brother Senior Warden, where is it situated?

**SW** – In the Centre of the building

**WM** -To whom does it allude?

**JW** – The Grand Geometrician of the Univers.

In English lodges the letter 'G' is found in the centre of the ceiling, and is on every Second Degree Tracing Board. In American lodges it is on or near the Master's chair. In other English speaking lodges also it usually has a place, but is there represented by a triangle containing the Hebrew name for God.

**Brother AB** – When our ancient Brethren were in the middle chamber of the Temple their attention was peculiarly drawn to certain Hebrew characters which are here depicted by the letter G, denoting God – the Grand Geometrician of the Universe, to whom we must all submit and whom we ought humbly to adore.

The absence of the letter 'G' in the appointments of foreign lodges is a key to much of the misunderstanding surrounding the symbol. A moment's thought will show that 'G' can be the initial letter of the word 'God' only in English and in a very few other languages—all of Saxon or Gothic origin. In no ancient language could 'G' mean 'God.'

It is reasonably certain that the letter was not used in English lodges as meaning 'God' until late in the eighteenth century, although it was a feature of lodges quite early in the eighteenth, and possibly during the seventeenth, centuries.

Some research has indicated that the name of God is only part of the masonic import of the letter; this significant letter, it can be said “denotes Geometry, which to Artificers is the science by which all their labours are calculated and formed; and to Masons, contains the determination, definition, and proof of the order, beauty, and wonderful wisdom of the power of God in His creation.”

The Continental masons who inscribed the name of God, or Jehovah, in Hebrew letters within the triangle, and displayed this in their lodges — which some present may recognise elsewhere—were harking back to an ecclesiastical custom of the sixteenth century.

The majority of masonic writers believe that the letter ‘G’ refers to Geometry, and the old catechisms also point that way. Here is a catechism printed in about 1750:

**WM-** Why was you made a Mason?

**JW -**For the sake of the Letter G.

**WM -** What does it signifye?

**JW -** GEOMETRY.

**WM -** Why GEOMETRY?

**JW -**Because it is the Root and foundation of all Arts and Sciences.

In the course of the eighteenth century there was much ritual-making, leading to great diversity between various workings. Take, for example, the following catechism (slight variations of it are known), printed in an *exposé* of 1766:

**WM -** Why was you made a Fellow-Craft?

**JW -**For the sake of the Letter G, which is inclosed in a Great Light

**WM -** What doth the G denote?

**JW -**Glory, Grandeur and Geometry, or the fifth Science—Glory for God, Grandeur for the Master of the Lodge, and Geometry for the Brothers.

The Great Light mentioned above refers of course to the Blazing Star.

In some lodges, if we are to draw conclusions from an *exposé* of 1730, the letter ‘G’ was given a definitely Christian significance:

**WM -** When you came into the middle, what did you see?

**JW -**The Resemblance of the Letter G.

**WM -** Who doth that G denote?



**JW** -.One that's greater than you.

**WM** - Who's greater than I, that am a Free and Accepted Mason, the Master of a Lodge?

**JW** -.The Grand Architect and Contriver of the Universe, or He that was taken up to the Top of the Pinnacle of the Holy Temple.

In the days when the above was published the letter 'G' was a symbol of the Fellow Craft lodge. In May 1742 two freemasons who had got themselves into trouble with Grand Lodge organized a procession of mock-masons, and from a newspaper report of the day we learn that the letter 'G' then signified geometry, or the fifth science, for the sake of which "all Fellow-Crafts are made. This letter G is the essence of the Fellow-Craft's lodge." (So closely identified was the letter 'G' with the Fellow Craft that we find him referred to as "a letter-G man.")

Worship Master, Brother Wardens, Brethren I hope this has been of some interest to you and that maybe when you next witness a Second Degree ceremony that you will perhaps recall some of the comments we have touched upon tonight. May I thank all those who have assisted me with this presentation. (Salute)

W.Bro John Tapson

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