

The Deeper Meaning of the FC Degree

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Introduction

I have come to understand that the three degrees in Craft Masonry are designed to take the candidate through three stages of evolution. The first degree (the degree of 'birth' and the *creative* aspect of the GAOTU) is about moving out of the darkness of base reason, and mastery of the physical sense-being. The second degree (the degree of 'life' and the *preservative* aspect of the GGOTU) is about mastery of the mind, and raising the intellect. The third degree (the degree of 'death' and the *destructive* aspect of the MH) is about understanding the eternal nature of life, and understanding spiritual principles.

Each degree is built on the one before, so there are three levels: physical, mental, and spiritual. The Installed Master 'degree' can be seen as a *further* step, the degree of 'mastery' of the spiritual path.

One of the amazing aspects of Masonic ritual is that *each* degree can *also* be seen at three levels: physical (the ritual); mental (the moral and intellectual aspects); and spiritual (the more hidden esoteric aspect). The first level (physical) is mostly obvious and consists of all you see and hear and do in the Lodge. This also includes some basic teaching of Astronomy. The second level (mental) is a little less clear, but most masons are aware of it, and spend some

time delving into the various moral and intellectual meanings and interpretations of this level. The third level (spiritual), however, is one that many masons are not even aware of, and may not become aware of unless they have done some research, especially into mysticism or ancient teachings. This third level, the spiritual aspect, is the subject matter of this lecture. In the lecture on the EA degree, I showed that the ritual actually tells every candidate about this level, and that our ritual incorporates some of the ancient mysteries, as taught from the dawn of time. These Theosophic teachings, sometimes called the Secret Doctrine, can be distilled into three points: the unity of the GAOTU; the immortality of the soul; and the need to seek spiritual enlightenment in order for the soul to ascend.

In the previous lecture, I covered what the candidate needed to do, at that level, to overcome the physical: coming into the light, through understanding and purification. It was also explained that the lodge and the temple, referred to throughout the degrees, at the spiritual level, is a symbol of the candidate *himself*, and that the officers represent various aspects of himself.

This Ceremony is one of Initiation into the mysteries of the *purified mind*, and the more **hidden paths of nature and science**. There is a lot more behind this statement, and it will be touched on again.

The Second Degree is directed, mainly, to the candidate's intellectuality, so that the, now purified, understanding of the man of virtue may strive to attain *intellectual* light, or mental illumination. This is a process, and experience, of a mental or psychological nature, which is difficult to dramatize and make spectacular, and is therefore left somewhat to silence and the imagination. We should consider this ceremony as designed to stand in contrast with the

other two, so that it should impress, not by drama, as in the other two degrees, but by what is *implied*. However, I cannot stress enough the importance of understanding *what* this degree represents.

The Ceremony is called one of "passing", since it relates to a *transitional* phase of personal experience, through which every aspirant to enlightenment must pass before he can think of attaining the ultimate degree of spiritual development and mastership to which our system points. He is to take an *upward* step in his evolution, to enter and explore a *higher level of his own being* with a view to understanding and controlling it, just as he is assumed to now understand and control his physical nature, as portrayed in the first degree. On his journey from the realm of the physical senses to that of the ultimate spirit, he must pass through an intermediate region, that of the soul or mind, which is the midway between the sensible (i.e. the physical) and the spiritual. Mind and Soul, for the purposes of this lecture, can be viewed as being the same thing, but should not be confused with Spirit, which is a higher level of our being.

Examination before Passing

In the examination before passing, in answer to the question "how do you know yourself to be a Mason?", the candidate replies: "by the regularity of my Initiation, by repeated trials and approbations", and by a willingness to "undergo further examination when called upon".

How many times has this question has been posed and answered, in an almost mechanical way! Has the candidate *really* thought about the answer, at all levels?

How would he know if his initiation has been regular? At the physical level, he may know, if he has read the Book of Constitution. However, at the mental and spiritual levels, what criteria have been used to be able to reply?

What "repeated trials" has he undergone? What tests of his virtue, his courage, his purity and his faith, has he undergone since being initiated? What "approbations" has he received, and from whom? Has he so overcome his trials as to have heard from his Master those "approbations" which enable him to "know" that he is on the right path. Is he really ready and willing, in body, mind, and spirit, to suffer further, perhaps more severe, trials "when duly called upon"? Does he understand the *Initiatic* tradition that goes back to the dawn of history? By the way, as stated in the previous lecture, the Master is the Master-Principle - the conscience or inner being.

I must emphasize how deep, and full of meaning, these test-questions are, which many masons are content to rush over and treat as merely routine formalities. I leave it to you to contemplate further.

Opening the Lodge in the Second Degree

Opening the lodge in the Second Degree means more than just changing the working tools and the page position of the VOSL. We use the term "going up" to the Second Degree. This raising implies, and requires, a corresponding *uplift of mind*, on the part of all present, to a *higher* level than what was required for the First Degree. In this Degree, we are to *pass*, and to help the Candidate to *pass*, beyond the concrete things of time and space (i.e. the

physical) to the realm of the more abstract world of mind, of soul. We are meant, in this Degree, to make a *mental ascent* to a higher place than in the previous Degree.

In the first degree, the body is dominant, and over-shadows the spiritual side of the Candidate's nature. In this degree, the body is dominated by the mind or soul, but as yet the spirit has not gained control over the latter. This is emphasized by the knocks, and the position of the square and compasses. This will be explained a little later.

The Lodge is declared to be "opened on the S....e". That simple tool takes on a philosophical value. It is composed of two arms joined at a right angle; one arm being horizontal, the other vertical. When one arm is laid level on the ground the other stands erect, pointing upwards. Those two arms then become a metaphor of the right relationship of body and mind when we are engaged in the mystical labour of the Second Degree. The bodily energies (the physical, represented by the horizontal arm) must now lie down and be passive, while the higher faculties of mind and soul (represented by the upright arm) should become active and aspire upwards. They contain allusions to cryptic truths requiring deep and prolonged attention, and they allude to matters involving far greater experience than is possible to a Brother who has only recently entered the Craft.

Prior to this, every one in the Lodge is required to "prove himself" a Mason of this Degree, which means that he must demonstrate, by a ceremonial gesture, that, for the work at hand, his outward and inward energies stand in the right relationship as symbolized by the arms of the square, the one temporarily dormant, the other in a state of activity, uprightness and aspiration. Only when all those present "prove themselves" *united* in this condition, can the Lodge truly be "opened on the S....e".

In the First Degree, all the knocks are evenly spaced. In this, the Fellowcraft Degree, two are joined. This indicates that the soul and body are now working in union although, as yet, the purely spiritual faculties have little influence.

Preliminary steps / Perambulation

We saw, in the previous lecture, that the perambulations around the Lodge, in the First Degree, symbolized the Candidate's wandering in the darkness before he found the path to Light. In this degree, it signifies that the human soul should continue searching for enlightenment and spiritual growth.

The candidate should think of these mystical journeys around the Lodge as symbolic of his soul's continued forward movement to his desired spiritual goal. He should think of the Deacon who guides him, (as explained in the previous lecture), as symbolic of his own unerring enlightened conscience, his inner guide. He should view the salutes he makes to the Master, during his progress, as recognition of higher spiritual powers within himself (as shown in the previous lecture – the Master represents his own master-principle). The examinations he has to undergo by the Wardens (i.e. the psyche and the intellect) should be understood as the testing of his qualifications to spiritual advancement, which every soul experiences on its upward path.

Approaching the Altar

The Mind or Soul (represented by the Senior Warden) tells the Divine Spirit (represented by the Worshipful Master) that he is ready to be passed, but, as in the former degree, is told to

get the assistance of the guide (or conscience) to direct him to advance towards the altar (or the centre) by the proper steps. The Soul therefore tells the intelligence (the link between spirit and mind, represented by the Senior Deacon), to instruct the Candidate how to advance.

The perambulations were made on the level floor of the Lodge, which the Candidate keeps on "squaring," visiting each of its four sides in turn. But now his forward motion on the level ceases, and he is directed to *mount*, spirally, by a certain number of winding steps. Motion now becomes circular, and he advances now not merely forward, but *up*, and *in*, towards the centre.

This movement is the most significant symbolism in this degree!

This change of motion, this spiral ascent, implies that the time has come when the Candidate must leave the level of the sense-world (i.e. the physical) and *rise* to the supra-sensual (i.e. the mental). He must divert his thoughts and desires from sensuous objects, and concentrate them on the insensible and much more important things of the world of mind. At the summit of this stairway, is the middle chamber of the temple (remember what the temple represents).

The candidate is approaching *his centre*.

From the moment of ascending the winding staircase, the Candidate is *mentally* leaving the outer world, more and more, behind him, and rising up into an inner invisible world. He is making what has been called in some groups "*the ascent of the mind to the Source of Light*", and it is these new regions, and the learning of their secrets and mysteries, that his labours as a Fellow Craft should be devoted. It will be a task claiming all his energy of mind, but the exercise of this will create new faculties as he progresses, and make possible for him what, at first, he may think is beyond his power and ability.

This ascent is also made towards the East (or source of Light) by a journey of five steps. Why five, and not more nor less? Because, as we have learned in the previous degree, man's nature is resolvable into a series or spectrum of seven distinct principles (corresponding with the seven officers forming a Lodge), but of these seven, the two lowest are left out in this Degree, and the five higher ones alone are actively engaged. Our two lowest principles (which are physical) are the senses and the carnal reason, both of which are, as it were, left behind and transcended in this Degree, whilst the higher, psychic and spiritual, faculties alone need to come into function, and it is to each of these that a step is allotted. The five-pointed star is a geometrical symbol of man's five higher principles.

You may wonder how one can dissociate the five higher principles from the two lower ones and use them separately, when they all seem so blended as to be inseparable? Well, learning to do so is one of the *chief* lessons of this Degree. In coming to any true knowledge of ourselves, we must begin by discriminating between what belongs to the sense-world and the supra-sensual world respectively, to distinguish between things transient, and things enduring. We do this, to a certain degree, when our bodies are asleep and the mind continues to function vividly, as it often does in dreams, and shall certainly have to do so when, at death, the outer senses and reason drop away altogether, leaving us with only our five higher principles. But it is important to learn to do this consciously, as the Secret Doctrine teaches, and it is the work of the Second Degree, to train the mind, and higher principles, to function consciously apart from the senses. This is a complex subject and cannot be pursued here for reasons of space/time. Every one must pursue his own study of it in his own way, and the determined seeker will soon learn details and methods for himself. I can only indicate here what the ascent by five steps alludes to, and leave those who so desire to take them. I

recommend a book, by Rudolf Steiner, called “How To Know Higher Worlds”, as a starting point.

Obligation

When the candidate takes his obligation, there are five squares present. The position in which the candidate takes his obligation makes three squares, and the instrument which supports his arm, and the one on the VOSL, produce two more, making five in all, corresponding to the five senses.

The distinction between the things of the head, and those of the “heart”, accounts for the difference in the posture assumed by the Candidate when taking his Obligation. The word “heart” is used here in its metaphoric sense. The right side and limbs of the body are associated with the head, and the left with the “heart”. In the First Degree, certain energies are required to be active and others passive. In the Second Degree their relationship must be reversed. When the mind, for instance, is busy, or called to concentrate, the senses must be quiescent, and vice versa. This is why first the right and then the left side of the body is divested in the successive Degrees: the right side is associated with active effort, and the left with passive receptivity.

In this degree, the head is enlightened by the heart so that reason and intuition function in unity, and cannot act separately, as either of them individually could prove a treacherous and misleading faculty (wrong-headedness is far more common than evil-heartedness, and responsible for far more mischief and suffering).

The Candidate for self-knowledge has to train himself to understand and discipline both his

head and his heart, to balance activity with contemplation; to labour zealously at practising virtue, especially the control of his sense-nature, but also to "study to be quiet" (as explained in the previous lecture), to watch for, and examine, perceptions, enthusiasms and passionate urges (whether good or bad) that well up from within him; above all to listen for the "still small voice" that may be heard speaking in his heart when passion and the senses subside.

In the First Degree, the penalty is related to the head. We saw that infidelity, in the form of abuse of speech, cut off the inner voice, in the sense that all power of spiritual utterance might disappear from it. In the Second Degree, the penalty relates to the "heart", which, if unfaithful to the purpose of this degree, may become "uprooted", as in the expression "that man has no heart".

The informed Brother will know that it is possible to sin psychically as well as physically and will be aware that there exist sound psycho-physiological reasons for the references in the penal provisions, and that the prescribed penalties have a concealed link to the offences involved. "Beasts of the field" and "ravenous birds of the air" are Scriptural terms for entities and intelligences which inhabit our world, physical and spiritual, and find easy prey and nesting places in hearts allowing them entrance. Those dangers are real, and our Obligation expressly refers to them. The Ritual goes on to say that "*you are now **permitted** to extend your researches into the more **hidden** paths of nature and science*". Until one possesses a high degree of personal purity, virtue and understanding, such research is not "permitted". Theosophic principles explain this more fully.

The altered relationship of the S. and C. implies that, until now, the candidate's latent spiritual principle (the compasses) is at last beginning to emerge from dormancy and concealment into

activity and personal consciousness, whilst his subordinate personality and physical sense-being (the square) recedes correspondingly into the background.

The Secrets

"The secrets of each Degree are to be kept separate and distinct from those in the former," says the Ritual. Think about in what respect those of the Second Degree are "separate and distinct" from those of the First. The secret of the First Degree had to do with the head, i.e., with the practical every-day intelligence and the performance of *active* duties. But those of the Second Degree are different: they are secrets of the "heart" or soul; of the intuitional and affectional side of our nature, which is subjective and *passive*.

Regarding the word: "S.....h". It is a Hebrew word, signifying, in English, "sprouting forth". It is expressive of the Candidate himself at this time. As the result of his work in the First Degree and of the "trials and approbations" he has undergone, new life has germinated within him. The ear of corn is a symbol of the Candidate's own soul growth, nourished by the fall upon it of the Living Water of Enlightenment. He is already a changed man and beginning to "sprout forth" spiritually; the inner forces of his soul have begun to organize and manifest themselves in his thoughts, his conduct, his speech, and his person.

In the Egyptian Rituals, the Candidate, holding an ear of corn fertilized by the sacred water of the Nile, declared "I am a germ of eternity!" and at his death grains of corn were buried with him as emblems of immortality. In the Eleusinian Mysteries, one of the most advanced and secret initiation rites was that in which an ear of corn was presented to the Candidate when

the "mysteries of Ceres" associated with it were revealed to him, and he was raised, by certain secret methods, to consciousness of his own deathlessness. Some Masonic jurisdictions, today, present the candidate with an ear of corn.

At the consecration of every Masonic Lodge, grains of corn are scattered to the four quarters of space; our Second Degree tracing Board displays growing corn, whilst the "full corn in the ear" is prominently exhibited in gold embroidery on the full dress collars of all Grand Lodge officers as an emblem that what once was sown in them as bare grain, has at last ripened to full and prolific fruit.

It is mentioned here because it is not an emblem to be carelessly passed by, or treated as a casual ceremonial detail. It is a symbol meant to be personally used. It is given to us as an idea to be taken into our private meditation and mentally dwelt upon until it ceases to be a symbol, and the truth veiled by it seeps into our consciousness as an irrefutable self-convincing light.

The Apron

As mentioned in the previous lecture, the triangular flap of the apron represents the spirit, while the rectangular part represents the physical. In some Masonic jurisdictions, Entered Apprentice masons wear the flap turned. The flap is turned down in the second degree to indicate that the spiritual is now overlaying the physical. The two rosettes represent the physical and the mental. There is a lot of symbolism in the apron, and you may enjoy researching that for yourself.

The Tracing Board Lecture

The SW's lecture, around the second degree Tracing Board, includes an allegory of the **wages** paid at the temple. The E.A.'s, representing those who are not yet very spiritually evolved, obtained merely simple maintenance (corn, wine, and oil), whereas it is specifically stated that the F.C.'s were paid their wages in specie, which, according to American ritual, they could only receive in the Middle Chamber. In other words, their wages (or payment) were of a *spiritual* nature, suitable to their more *evolved* spirituality, and that this was so is shown by the fact that they received them in the middle chamber, which is an allegory for the secret chamber of the Heart (the centre), wherein resides the Divine Spark. In Ontario ritual, this is implied: it tells that a password was required by the Fellowcraft to ascend the winding staircase which led to the middle chamber of the temple.

The **winding staircase** spirals round a central column, so that when the candidates reached the top, after three, five, seven, or more steps, they had advanced neither to the East nor to the West, but were still revolving around the centre.

The **three** who rule a Lodge represent the Body, Soul, and Spirit, which, together, constitute Man. The **five** who form a Lodge are the five senses of the physical man. But the physical man has both soul and spirit, each of which has its own peculiar sense: the Soul having psychic faculties, and the Spirit mystical and inspirational.

To find our own Centre (our real self) involves, therefore, a turning inwards of our previously externalized faculties of sense and thought, and an introspective penetration of the elements

of our nature, until the "Centre" is found. This task is represented by our ceremonial perambulations and by the path of the winding staircase leading from the ante-rooms and forecourts of our nature to the Centre, up which the aspirant must ascend, asking, seeking, knocking, all the way; being subjected, from time to time, to tests of his progress, and receiving, without scruple or diffidence, such wages of good fortune or adversity as unseen Providences may know to be his due.

He will find the innermost sanctuary to be closely guarded. Nothing unclean can enter or approach that holy place. Hence in the biblical description of the symbolic Temple one finds that, in the forecourt, stood the great laver of water for the cleansing of pollutions, and the altar of fire for the sacrificial burning up of one's impurities. The sword of the Tyler, directed to those unqualified to enter the Lodge, is the Masonic way of indicating that danger exists to those who are not properly prepared to approach the Centre or who would rush in rashly. As the ritual says: S.....h was used as a password in a FC lodge to prevent any ***unqualified*** person from ascending the winding staircase which led to the middle chamber of the temple. This is a test of merit for your whole nature: if your spirit fails to ring true, you will not be able to enter a higher state of consciousness.

The "**G**" had its equivalent in the Egyptian Mysteries in the solar symbol of Ra, the spiritual Sun. In the great temple of the Greek Mysteries at Delphi, where the Eleusinian initiations took place for seventeen centuries, it was represented by the fifth letter of the Greek alphabet (Eta); five being a numerical symbol of man in the Pythagorean system, as evidenced by his five senses, and in accordance with considerations of a more *hidden* nature. Hence, the five-pointed star (and the pentagram) is also a symbol of man, and expresses a variety of truths concerning him. In the rituals described in the Book of the Dead, the candidate is described as a "keeper of five" ; Operative fellow-craft Masons worked in groups of five, and a fellow-

craft Lodge to-day consists of five brethren ("five keep a lodge). All these allusions have a deeper significance than can be explained here, but have a bearing upon the present state of our evolutional development.

Centrally, suspended from the ceiling in the centre of each Lodge, is exhibited this striking symbol. It is the emblem of the Divine Presence at the spiritual centre of the individual Mason. The fact that it is in the C...e reminds us of that hidden centre in every man, where resides the Divine Spark.

Closing

In the closing of this degree, it is noteworthy that it is the J.W. (representing the Body), who plays the most important part. This is, of course, appropriate, as we have been dealing throughout with the body and its senses.

At the centre of *ourselves* is the "All Seeing Eye", so that *we* ourselves constitute our own Judgment Book, wherein each of us inscribes his own history and determines his own destiny, and *we* ourselves know what is in its pages.

Summary

To summarize: in the first degree, the sense-nature must be brought into subjugation and the practice of virtue be acquired before the mind can be educated; in the second degree, the mind, in turn, must be educated, disciplined, and controlled, before truths that transcend the mind can be perceived. The candidate must understand that he has to *rise up* from the base physical nature, and *prepare* his mind and intellect for further enlightenment, and seek for that

enlightenment from the *centre* of his being.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Brethren, I trust that you will no longer find the second degree ritual to be dull and boring, that you will understand its importance and bring more energy to it so that the candidate will feel that this is something very significant.

Again, I've only scratched the surface. I leave it to you to discover more.

References

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