

The Wonderful Second Degree

A STUDY FOR THE ENQUIRING FREEMASON

The Wonderful Second Degree

Brethren, when we think of the Second Degree in freemasonry what do many freemasons think of? Many think of it as the easy degree; the short degree. Twice around the dance floor, a short obligation to repeat and then off to the Tracing Board. It is sometimes viewed as the least dramatic of the three degrees; there is no blindfold or challenge for money as in the First degree; and you certainly do not re-enact the events of the Third degree. Many see it as the short ceremony between joining freemasonry and becoming a master mason, but brethren it is so much more than that and hopefully this paper can convince you otherwise of this view.

Where to start? Well, let's look at our tri-gradual system, our three degrees, and what they represent. We are told that the first degree can be seen as a representation of man's entry into the world, blind and in a state of helpless indigence - his birth. He knows nothing of the world he has entered and he needs guidance and teaching. The third degree is explained to us as preparing us for our inevitable end, and how to face it. It completes our education by the inclusion of the facts about this most final act.

So, if the First degree represents Birth and our need for knowledge, and the Third degree completes this quest for knowledge and represents Death, what does that leave the Second degree representing?

Brethren, it represents Life, the very essence of our existence, the bringer of happiness and sadness. It is the learning degree, the degree that provides the signposts for us to follow to learn and gain that knowledge to help us become that superstructure, which is perfect in its parts and honourable to the builder. It should be the degree that helps teach us so much, but which is sometimes seen a mere infill, something that makes us a fellowcraft, and enables us to become a Master Mason.

The clues to what this wonderful degree can teach us are all there, but nowadays most Masons are so eager to get the degree out of the way that very little attention is paid to the words spoken during the Second degree.

In many cases the new Worshipful Master is so busy learning the words to deliver the perfect ceremony that he pays little attention to what he is reading, to actually understand the meaning of the words he is learning. The Wardens and the other Officers are often the same, and when the ceremony takes place the rest of the brethren in the Lodge are watching to see if the ceremony goes OK, to see if an Officers gets their words right, rather than sitting and actually listening and learning from what is being said.

However, if we can only stop for a while and look at what the Second degree is telling us, we will uncover such riches that it puts the First and Third degree into the shadows.

How is man to progress unless he learns, how can man improve, become that proud Temple his God hopes he will become unless he learns? The Second degree tells us that as a Craftsman, we are expected to make the liberal Arts and Sciences our future study, that we may the better be enabled to discharge our duties as a man and a Mason, and estimate the wonderful works of the Almighty. Also, as a craftsman we are told that we "...are now enabled to extend our researches into the hidden mysteries of Nature and Science."

Now, when your author heard these words during his second degree he was excited, really looking forward to learning something. Learn what exactly, he wasn't sure, but he knew some people who would. Sadly, however, after asking for clarification from both his Proposer, and his Lodge Secretary as to what he should learn, he received answers both similar in their import:- "Don't be funny young man, just learn what's in the book". So for many of what were his "Lost" years, your author, probably like many young masons before, ignored the teachings of the Second degree. The seven liberal Arts and Sciences took a back seat on his Masonic journey.

Interestingly, the study of the seven Liberal Arts and Sciences can be traced back to medieval Universities. Several masonic and historical books infer that they were called Universities because it is believed that back in the middle ages these institutions taught all about the known universe at that time. The new student was first taught what was called the "Trivium of Arts", which were grammar, rhetoric, and logic. This took the student about three or four years to complete, after which they became a Bachelor of Arts. Following on from this they studied the "Quadrivium of Sciences", Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and Astronomy. When, after a number of years, they were suitably qualified in these subjects the student was given the title of "Master of Arts and Science" A portion of which we were recommended to study in the Charge after initiation in the 1st Degree interestingly enough.

As part of our Second degree life we are encouraged by the words in the blue book to discover the wonders of the world, to learn what makes us better people, fit members of regularly organised society, and THAT is what the Second degree is re-enforcing within all masons, if only we took the time to listen and follow that guidance. It can provide that Light masons are all in search of, if only we were to find the time and will to look for it.

It used to be different. Before the formation of Grand Lodge in 1717, or there about, there were only two degrees in Freemasonry for both Operative and Accepted Masons. For the Operative Mason he had to learn much of the teachings of the Second degree before he became a qualified fellowcraft. The degree "ceremony" in those days consisted of a series of questions and answers and as one would expect, if you didn't know the answers how could you expect to advance? As an aside, the giving and receiving of the five points of Fellowship used to be part of the Second degree ritual.

Even the Speculative and Accepted Masons took it upon themselves to learn about the seven Liberal Arts and Sciences. What was it about Freemasonry that lead such eminent men as Elias Ashmole the politicians and astronomer, Robert Moray the diplomat and judge, and Randal Holmes, an Alderman of Chester to become freemasons? It is believed that it was the knowledge to be gained by the study of these seven Liberal Arts and Sciences, and the other lessons that freemasonry delivered at that time that drew such men into the ranks of

Freemasonry. Some may say how times have changed, but have they? Research has revealed that there is overwhelming evidence that no great effort was made by the founding brethren of Grand Lodge back in 1717 to make any greater study of the Seven liberal Arts and Sciences than that of many today's brethren.

The Fellowcraft, the Mason of the Second degree was, and some will say still is, the most important person in Freemasonry, it was he who was the master mason in the Second degree. When we listen to the explanation of the Tracing Board we are told that "At the building of King Solomon's Temple an immense number of masons were employed, they consisted of entered apprentices and Fellowcrafts" There is no mention of master masons, those of the Second degree were the main players. It was Fellowcrafts, fifteen of them, who were the Overseers spoken of in the Third degree, sent to find out if Hiram were yet dead or alive. Is it not strange that in our ceremonies there is little mention of master masons, but the Fellowcraft features quite often? Why might this be? One answer is that the master mason is a 260 year old 'modern' introduction.

In other Orders the Fellowcraft plays a major part, in fact without giving too much away, in one Order it is a Fellowcraft who supervises the Lodge of Operative Masons. So hopefully brethren you are now beginning to see the importance of the Second degree and the role of the Fellowcraft.

Returning to the Tracing Board of the Second degree, it also gives an insight into the design of King Solomon's Temple. Not only does it describe the magnificence of its decoration, it also tells us that the Temple was a three-storey building. What, you didn't notice that bit? Fellowcrafts are told that their ancestors went into the middle chamber of the Temple to receive their wages. This simple sentence tells us that the Temple was a three storey building, the ground floor, the top floor, and Middle floor, or Chamber. The Middle Chamber wasn't some secret room deep in the heart of the Temple, it was simply the middle floor between the ground and top floor. There is more to discover in the story of the Tracing Board, such as the importance of the fellowcraft in the structure of the Lodge. While 3 might rule a Lodge it is 5 who hold a Lodge, and the two additions to enable a Lodge to be held are not Master Masons they are fellowcrafts. Look deeper brethren, discover for yourself what else the Tracing Board can tell you.

Further evidence of the importance of the Second degree can be found in the Ceremony of installation of a New Master of the Lodge, not an old re-cycled one. Think back brethren, you have probably seen the installation of a new Master on so many occasions that the answer to the following question is now taken for granted.

The question is this, in what degree does the New Master elect give his unqualified assent to the ancient Charges of the Order? The Second degree. In what degree does the Master Elect take his obligation of Master? The Second degree. Nothing happens in the Third degree, with the exception of requesting all below the rank of installed Master to retire. It is the Second degree, where Masters are made, not the Third.

Finally, brethren, for the final proof that the 2nd Degree is both wonderful and the most important degree ask yourself the following four Questions:

1. **What is the symbol of the Office of a Junior Warden?**
Answer: A Plumb Rule
2. **What is the symbol of the Office of a Senior Warden?**
Answer: The Level
3. **What is the symbol of the Office of a Master of the Lodge?**
Answer: The Square
4. **What are the working tools of the Second degree?**

The Square, The Level, and the Plumb rule.

Your Worshipful Master does not wear a skirret, your Senior Warden does not wear compasses, and your Junior Warden does not wear a pencil. They wear the working tools of the Second Degree. The working tools that allowed fellowcrafts to design and build what were seen as the gravity defying buildings of the Greeks, the Romans, and every age until the industrial revolution. It was the fellowcraft of the Second Degree who possessed the secret arts and hidden mysteries of the Noble Art, geometry that they swore to keep inviolate.

What more proof if any is required to show that the Second degree is not only wonderful, but was, and in the view of some masons, still is the most important degree in Freemasonry? ∴

Studies for the New Freemason.

This booklet was prepared and type-set by Bro. J.S. Donaldson, Secretary of Hawick Lodge No. 111 for the education of the enquiring Freemason.

Article 10 – 2020