

Edward (Ted) F. Dunsmore

DDGM Talks

Talk Number 8

Title: The Second or Fellowcraft Degree

Presented at: Grantham Lodge No. 697

Date: October 29, 2018

## THE SECOND OR FELLOWCRAFT DEGREE

The Entered Apprentice Degree was full of surprises, had many lessons, and was also a mind-boggling experience. The 3<sup>rd</sup> degree led to significant contemplation and self evaluation..., but, I've always had a soft spot in my heart for the Fellowcraft degree. Whether it was because by that time I had a "little better feel" for the possible instruction of that degree, or whether it was just that it was shorter in length than the other two degrees, I don't know. However, it is my choice of topic for this evening.

Throughout my Masonic career I have heard many brethren refer to the Fellowcraft degree as something sandwiched between the Entered Apprentice Degree and the Master Mason Degree as a filler. In a way that may be true, but that begs the question, what is the filler in the middle of a sandwich? It's the meat or at least the tasty ingredient! In this light then, the Fellowcraft degree may be seen to be the focus (the meat or tasty part) of the Masonic sandwich.

Instead of being simply a buffer degree between the beginning and completion of Craft Freemasonry, the Fellowcraft degree presents an opportunity for using to the fullest, the faculties of even the most studious. Indeed, we miss some of the most important lessons in Freemasonry when we do not give this degree the same study that we give to the other degrees.

A study of Freemasonry of the pre-Grand Lodge era leaves no doubt that the Fellowcraft degree was once the ultimate in Freemasonry. It was the highest degree until shortly after the formation of the premier Grand Lodge in London in 1717. History informs us that the Operative Entered Apprentice laboured seven years with freedom, fervency and zeal, then presented his Master's piece and if it were judged to be of

merit, and he had determined his mark by which all future works could be identified, he became a Master or Fellow of the Craft. There further seems little doubt that, up until the Grand Lodge era there was minimal ritual for the Master's or Fellowcraft degree, and it probably would be more accurate to speak of it in that early period as a grade, rather than a degree. Further there is authentic record that there were many, many Entered Apprentices who never advanced from that grade.

Approaching the Grand Lodge era there seems to have been some elaborations of the ritual and the Fellowcraft/Master Mason degree was conferred infrequently in district meetings. Shortly after the formation of the premier Grand Lodge, it seems the Master's part was removed from the Fellowcraft grade and made a separate grade or degree, which for some years was conferred only in Grand Lodge.

Thus, the Fellowcraft degree which was conferred usually in district meetings, and the Master Mason degree, conferred only in Grand Lodge were the ultimate degrees. The manufacture of the so-called higher degrees as we know them today had not yet been started, and the degree mill was yet to be invented.

Proof, or at least clear indication, that the Fellowcraft degree once was the ultimate is found in the fact that our three principal officers wear as their jewels the Working Tools of the Fellowcraft, the Square, Level and Plumb. These jewels were adopted at the formation of the premier Grand Lodge in 1717, before there was a third degree, and when the Master degree evolved, or was added, the officers continued to wear the jewels already assigned to them.

If we accept the concept that Masonry is in reality the life of man, then in today's Masonic schedule the Fellowcraft has advanced from the Entered Apprentice degree, symbolic of birth and youth, and now stands at the threshold of the Master mason degree, symbolic of later life. The

Fellowcraft degree, must therefore be symbolic of middle life—the period of effort and study—the period that should be the one of the greatest mental activity and production.

What we accomplish in that “mid life” is up to each of us. We probably have greater control over this “era” than we have over either our early youth or later life stages. It is in this stage (the middle stage) that we “produce our mark” to establish our place in later life and beyond.

Likewise, in my opinion, in Masonry as it is in life, what we experience and what we accomplish in the middle degree/stage/grade is of utmost significance. I believe, and my limited personal experience certainly supports that belief, that there is much for the student of Freemasonry to discover as he researches the “symbolism” found in this degree—the 2 great pillars, the winding stairs, the middle chamber, the ear of corn beside the stream, the wages of the Fellowcraft, the orders of architecture, the liberal arts and sciences or the letter “G”. Any of these could be a suitable topic for a DDGM address or for a Masonic Education presentation in the Lodge as part of an ongoing Masonic development programme.

I return therefore to my earlier comments regarding the Second degree. The Fellowcraft degree is not merely a “buffer”, it is the meat or the nourishment—a stage that cannot be ignored without significantly affecting the ultimate aspirations of a Mason’s life.

That is why I am so partial to this degree. It may be short—it may be sandwiched in between two other illuminating degrees—but there is so very, very much for the student of Masonry. It deserves greater attention! Something to think about, my brethren.

A little poem to close:

You'll find the road is long and rough, with soft spots far apart,  
Where only those can make the grade, who have the uphill Heart.  
And when they stop you with a thud or jolt with a crack,  
Let courage call the signals as you keep on coming back.  
Let every game's end find you still upon the battle line:  
For when the One Great Scorer comes to mark against your name,  
He writes—not that you won or lost—but how you played the game.

Thank you, Worshipful Master for the opportunity to speak openly,  
and thank you Brethren for your time and attention this evening. Take  
care.