

The Meaning Of The Term “Fellowcraft”.

“Fellow Craft” is one of the large number of terms which have a technical meaning peculiar to Freemasonry and are seldom found elsewhere. In Operative Masonry, a “craft” was an organization of skilled workmen in some trade or calling; a “fellow” meant one who held membership in such a craft, obligated to the same duties and allowed the same privileges.

In Freemasonry, it possesses two separate meanings, one of which we may call the Operative meaning, and the other the Speculative.

In its Operative period, Freemasons were skilled workmen engaged as architects and builders; like other skilled workmen they had an organized craft of their own, the general form of which was called a “guild”. This guild had officers, laws, rules, regulations, and customs of its own, rigorously binding on all members.

It divided its membership into two grades, the lower of which, composed of apprentices, was explained to you in our first meeting.

You have already learned the operative meaning of Fellow Craft; now that the craft is no longer operative, the term possesses a very different meaning, yet it is still used in its original sense in certain parts of the Ritual, and, of course, it is frequently met with in the histories of the Fraternity.

Operative Masonry began to decline at about the time of the Reformation, when lodges became few in number and small in membership. A few of these in England began to admit into membership men with no intention of practicing Operative Masonry, but who were attracted by the Craft’s antiquity, and for social and philosophical reasons. These were called Speculative Masons. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, these Speculatives so increased in numbers that they gained control, and during the first quarter of that century completely transformed the Craft into the Speculative Fraternity we now have.

Although they adhered as closely as possible to the old customs, they made some radical changes to fit the Society for its new purposes. One of the most important of these was to abandon the old rule of dividing the members into two grades, or degrees, and to adopt the new rule of dividing them into three. The second was called the Fellow Craft’s Degree, the third the Master Mason’s Degree.

The term fellow craft is now used as the name of one who has received the second degree. You are a Fellowcraft; you have passed through the ceremonies, assumed the obligations of the Fellowcraft’s Degree, and are registered as a Fellowcraft in the books of the Lodge. You can sit in your own Lodge when open as either a lodge of Apprentices, or of Fellowcrafts, but not as Master Masons. Your duties are to do and be all that a Fellowcraft’s Lodge requires.

Freemasonry is too extensive to be exemplified in a ritual or to be presented through initiation in one evening. One Degree follows another and the members of each stand on a different level of rights and duties; but this does not mean that the Masonry presented in either the First or the Second degree, so far as its nature and teachings are concerned,

is less important, or less binding, than that presented in the Third Degree. All that is taught in the First and Second Degrees belongs as vitally and permanently to Freemasonry as that which is taught in the Third; there is a necessary subordination in the grades of membership, but there is no subordination of the Masonry presented in each grade.

Do not, therefore, be tempted to look upon the Fellow Craft's Degree as a mere stepping stone to the Third. Freemasonry gave to you one part of itself in the First, another portion in the Second, and in the Third it will give you yet another, but it is always Freemasonry throughout. Therefore, we urge on you the same studious attention while you are a Fellow Craft that you doubtless expect to give when you are a Master Mason.

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