

Fifty Words In Freemasonry

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FIFTY WORDS IN FREEMASONRY

ALLEGORY

No lexicographer ever yet has found an adequate and self-consistent definition of this poetical old word because in its uses it tends to melt away into other things, like two clouds merging. There is, however, a clue to an understanding of it hidden away in the word itself. The first two syllables are a form of the Greek *allos*, which meant other, other than, and is preserved in English in one form as *alias*, which means that a man uses a name other than his own. An allegory is a story told, written, or enacted which goes under an alias. It is not what it seems. While John Bunyan is describing the adventures of a pilgrim he is in reality writing about the soul's struggle with sin. While Jonathan Swift is telling "The Tale of a Tub" he is in reality setting down a satire against theological rancor. So also is it in the Masonic degrees. What appears to be an acted-out account of Solomon's temple is in reality a discourse on a man's progress, and more specially of his progress in the world of work. What appears to be a story of man going in Search of That Which Was Lost is in reality a profoundly true and beautiful monologue on the theme of what is to be done when a master craftsman is lost to his craft.

APPRENTICE

In its earliest form this word had the meaning of to lay hold of, to seize, but at a very early time it was narrowed to mean the kind of laying hold of and seizing which a man must do when he is a learner. (As is our word *apprehend*.) Early in the Middle Ages this word came into free use among the guilds to denote a boy who had started in to learn a skilled trade or art under a master, and in obedience to many guild rules and regulations. It was spelled in many forms, as *apprentice*, *prentice*, *prentis*, *prentiss*, *prentys*, etc. In modern Speculative Freemasonry the word is not employed in its original broad sense, but has a meaning narrow and technical. A Masonic apprentice is more than a learner in general; he is one who has begun to learn a very special art, under obligations taken by himself, according to fixed rules, and in obedience to masters and other authorities.

APRON

The words of men, like all their possessions and activities, are subject to accident. This word came into existence as the result of that type of verbal accident which etymologists call *elision*, which means the dropping out of something. For centuries the word *napron* meant a white square of cloth, and from that term came such others as *napery*, *napkin*, and *map*; the phrase "a *napron*" was used so frequently that at last, and through *elision*, this became changed into the more easily pronounced "an *apron*," and afterwards the "an" was dropped. The Operative Mason's apron was made of leather, and was designed to receive hard wear (usually it hung from his neck to his ankles); why was it then that a Speculative candidate is given a white apron? When William Preston wrote his monitorial lecture he acted on the assumption that the color symbolized innocence. Historians of the Craft would not quarrel with Preston, but they might add the comment that it is white in the same sense that a sheet of paper is white before a writer begins to set down words upon it; which would mean, that it is white because he is a beginner.

ASHLAR

In its ten or twelve spellings this word is encountered in the written records left behind by the Operative Masons probably more often than any other term still preserved in the Craft's nomenclature. The word itself has a respectable antiquity. It derived from the early Latin axis which was a board or plank but later it was extended to slabs of cut stone. From that same origin came into English such words as axis itself, axle, alar (wing shaped), aileron. The Operative Masons denoted by rough ashlar a stone as hewn from the quarry, given an approximate shape and dimension. A finished ashlar was a stone accurately shaped and cut, ready for use. A perpend (or perpent) ashlar was a finished ashlar of a special type. It may be that our own word-phrase Perfect Ashlar derived from the last named.

CALENDAR

To the days on which their accounts fell due (and such days had a solemn importance to a Roman because to pay his bills promptly was a point of honor) the Romans gave the name of calendae. From it we have our own word calendar. During its wide usage over these two thousand years the word had denoted two large bodies of facts. On the one hand a calendar divides off time into units of years, seasons, months, days, and uses a system of names or numbering to identify each one. On the other hand it also preserves lists of annual occasions, such as church feasts, and correlates them with the divisions of the year. The calendar has an extraordinarily large place in the rituals of all the Masonic rites, so large that it puzzles Masonic scholars to guess why no literature on the subject has ever been produced. A number of rites, symbols, emblems, rules and regulations have no meaning except in terms of a calendar.

CANDIDATE

Beautiful beyond description is this ancient word. It began, probably four thousand years ago, with a Sanskrit root word which we should spell as cand, and which meant to shine, as when light shines. Through thick and through thin it has continued to center in that same early use ever since. The ancient Greeks called a glowing coal kindaros. The Latins used candidus to denote something white and glowing. From it we have such words as candelabrum, candescent, candle, candid, candidate, etc. Among the Romans a seeker for public office wore a bright, white toga to signify that he had pure intentions and nothing to conceal. A Masonic candidate stands in the same case, because he comes well recommended, and under the tongue of good report. It is for him to see that his record, which is to become represented by the white lambskin, is never stained or polluted.

CEREMONY

In one or another of its many forms and disguises this word has been in use from very ancient times among nearly all of the peoples of Europe, including the eastern Slavs. Throughout all this time, and regardless of its form, the term has persistently preserved at its core the meaning of something done to express awe, a way to show honor, something solemn, something which always tends to become religious. A ceremony therefore cannot be a mere formality, something empty, something make-believe, but must be genuine, must express sincere emotions, and those emotions are such as abhor levity, facetiousness, carelessness.

CHARTER

This word, which carries its meaning within itself, began with the Latin carta, which in its earliest period meant a leaf of paper; but it was narrowed to denote such things as in our own language are denoted by words that are derived from it, card, charter, chart, chartism, chapter, chapter, etc. The whole point about a charter is that it carries within itself, solely as a written document, and not looking elsewhere, an authorization to be or to do certain things. There is much evidence to show that the first written Masonic documents, which are called Old Charges, were first used as charters. When a Grand

Lodge grants a charter it is as if the Grand Lodge deposited a certain authority in the written paper; a lodge can work only as long as it has such a document in its possession.

CLANDESTINE

Far back in the dim beginning of European history Sanskrit-speaking people had a root word which we should spell as clam, and which meant something secret, hidden, concealed. It was preserved in the Greek language, then passed from it into Latin where it took the form of clandestinus, from which we have our word clandestine. The newspapers use it in the sense of something illicit, but there is no need that the term should always denote something in that bad sense. In Freemasonry it is used technically, and receives its definition from the laws enacted by the Grand Lodge. The Code of the Grand Lodge of Iowa gives two paragraphs on the word: “A clandestine lodge is one without a Dispensation, Charter, or Warrant from a recognized Grand Lodge . . . None are Masons unless made in a lodge working under authority of a recognized Grand Lodge.”

COMMUNICATION

Many centuries ago the word communis was used in Europe to mean to partake of, to share in. As in the case of so many other words which began with a broad, general meaning this word was in time narrowed down to mean usually a sharing in, or partaking of information, news, council, conference. (The Lord’s Supper came to be called a communion because it meant a sharing in.) One man who shares information or news with another is therefore said to communicate with him. If an informal, unofficial gathering of Masons takes place it is called a meeting, or an assembly; if the meeting is held officially, at a time and place specified under by-laws, rules, and regulations it is called a communication. It is so called because each member of the lodge shares in the conference and councils equally with every other member.

CONSTITUTE

The Latin-speaking peoples had the word statuere, by which they meant to place things together – such of our words as statue, statuary, state, stand, statute, have preserved the same term in many forms. When they added to it the prefix con they had a family of words which meant in general to set up, to frame, so set things together; from that family we have our word constitute. A constituted thing is something framed or set up, usually by a number of persons acting together, and in most instances the structure is expected to be permanent. From this it is easy to see why it is said that a Grand Lodge or a lodge is constituted; also, it is easy to see that in the act of constituting it two factors are necessary. One, it must be well-framed in order to be lasting and secure; second, it must be officially approved and its purposes and functions officially declared. (The words station and stationary are from the same origin.)

CRAFT

Many centuries ago the earliest ancestors of Anglo-Saxon peoples had a word which meant power, strength, and was spelled in some such form as kraefr. After it had been transplanted to England it took on the additional meanings of skill, trained hands, cleverness, subtlety (which is retained in our word crafty). At one time what are now called the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences in our Monitor were called The Seven Crafts. In the Middle Ages all trained workmen were in guilds, societies, and fraternities, therefore craft came to be the name given to any one of the skilled trades or arts in general. The modern fraternity of Speculative Freemasonry continues, in one aspect of it, to be a craft, partly because it is organized, partly because the members of its lodges are skilled in the Masonic arts, and more particularly because of the ritualistic art of making Masons.

DEACON

The ancient Greeks had a term (about which there is some obscurity) which meant to be swift of foot, to go speedily, to run errands, to serve by running errands, to be a messenger. It passed through

Latin and came into English, in the latter of which it became deacon. Very early in history the Christian Church adopted it as the name for a church officer, and it continues to be oftener used in churches than elsewhere. In Operative Freemasonry lodges, companies, incorporations, and guilds not infrequently used it as the name of one of the principal officers. In modern Speculative Lodges the two deacons are messengers and in a general way give personal assistance to the Worshipful Master and the Senior Warden. (A history of this old and very interesting office as it is employed in all the branches of the Craft needs badly to be written.) The need for such an office is explained by the fact that the Master and his Wardens occupy stations which they are not to leave except when their own duties make it necessary, in which cases they return to their stations immediately after the duty is performed.

DEGREE

In ancient Latin gradus was a step, a stage, a degree, (the last named being still used in our phrase, "there are 360° in a circle.") By combining with it the prefix de, such words were formed as degree, degrade, degradation ("sinking to a lower level"), and, without the prefix, such words as grade, gradual, graduation, etc. The general idea behind all the forms of the word is that there are certain movements which a man may make, in a straight line, on the level, in a circle on the level, or up, or down which in the nature of things are marked off in stages, are graduated; he must make his movement in a series of separate steps. It is but a short distance from this general meaning to the special meaning with which the word is used in Freemasonry, for the candidate does not make his journey through Freemasonry in a single, uninterrupted advance, but must make it in stages clearly defined, one step at a time.

DUE GUARD

This strange word is apparently not found in use anywhere outside of Freemasonry. Professional philologists confess that they have never heard of it; it is seldom included in dictionaries, even the largest, and in many volumes. Is the "due" a form of the same word as "duty?" Or is it a form of the French name for God? The Huguenots, who were French protestants before the Protestant Reformation, employed it in the latter sense, and made it denote "God guard you." Many analysts of the Ritual are inclined to believe that in our lodges we employ it more nearly in the former sense, so that a man is expected to make it his duty to guard something. Until the history of the word has been discovered there will always be an uncertainty about its meaning.

EMBLEM

The word emblem and the word symbol had a similar origin in the ancient Greek language, but even at the beginning there was a clear-cut difference between the two, and that difference remains. A symbol itself has no similarity to the thing for which it stands. A circle with wings on it may symbolize everlasting life, but everlasting life itself will never be similar to a circle with wings on it. An emblem, on the other hand, is not only similar to that for which it stands but also is an actual instance of it. A sword is an emblem of war because it is an actual weapon used in war. A pen is an emblem of literature because it is actually used in writing. A plow is an emblem of farming because it is actually used in farming. A beehive is an emblem of industry because the work of a hive of bees is an instance of industry.

FELLOW

This old and beautiful word appears to have begun far back in the earliest period of the Anglo-Saxon language. Its first usage indicates that it was formed by combining two words, one of which we still have in the form of fee, the other of which meant to lay, to lay down. The word is a picture of how a number of men when forming an association contribute equal shares toward its costs, or else make over to it equal shares of property. This equality of membership is still the principal point in its meaning as used in the Masonic lodge. In Operative times an apprentice became a fellow of the craft when he became a full member, on a par with all other members, and with the same rights and duties. He was at

the same time a master mason, because he was not granted full membership until after he had mastered his art. The two words became separated in the middle of the eighteenth century when fellow became used as the name of the second degree, master as the name of the third. In the historical and technical senses of the word, Freemasonry is a fellowship because all the members of a lodge have the same rights, duties, and privileges.

FRATERNITY

Brother is one of the oldest and finest words in the language. In the ancient Greek it had the form of phrater, in Latin it became frater; it always denoted brother, or brothers, or something which had to do with brotherly relationships. When correctly applied to an association or society the word therefore becomes its own definition: a fraternity is any society in which the members act toward each other in a brotherly way, are brother-like, comprise a brotherhood. This brotherliness is not incidental to such a society, but is itself the society's principal purpose, or one of its purposes. In the early periods of the builders' craft, local masons had an organization of their own called a gild. The Freemasons were not tied down to a local organization but were free to travel about, each one for himself, and from country to country: therefore their own organization had more of the nature of a fraternity than it did a gild. In one form or another, to one extent or another, Freemasonry has been a fraternity from its beginning.

FREEMASON

Books and treatises have been written about this extraordinary word. (See under "Mason.") Builders in the Middle Ages were called masons. Among them were a number of kinds or grades of craftsmen, such as rough masons, wallers, quarrymen, etc. The evidence indicates that such of them, and comprising a very special class of them, as could design, as well as construct great architectural structures such as cathedrals, churches, chapels, borough halls, monasteries and castles were called freemasons. Why were they described as "free?" The probabilities are that the adjective denoted a number of different facts about them. They worked in free-stone, which was a building stone without much grain in it, and therefore could be carved without danger of splitting. They were free to go from one community or country to another to do their work, a privilege not granted to local masons. They enjoyed "the freedom of the city," which meant that they could go and come through the city gates at will, and were not subject to many local restrictions. As they moved from one country to another they were freed from a number of restrictions which the church imposed upon craftsmen. Inside his own fraternity each master of the art was "free of his gild," which meant, among many other things, that he was a full-fledged member, could hold office, etc.

GAGE

By a gate (also spelled gauge) usually is meant a rod, stick, etc., accurate in length and subdivisions, used for making linear measurements. It is believed that it began as the name for a stick used to measure the wine in a cask; also, it was once used as the name for a liquid measure. The idea that a man should make use of measure in his life and work was a favorite theme with the Greek philosophers who did not believe that a man should trust himself to luck, or be the victim of circumstances, or let his affairs go by accident. That theme stands close to the Masonic meaning. By which, against what, can a man measure himself? By rationing his hours; by setting his own skill against the corresponding skill of others; by setting up an ideal; by estimating accurately his own ability in order to avoid attempting what is impossible for him. Brother George Washington suggested yet another standard of measure in his great sentence about the "good and the wise:" all men who can be so described are a standard against which a man can take his own measure.

GAVEL

There is confusion among the craft about this word. In addition to its correct usage it also is made incorrectly to denote the Master's hiram, a hammer, a setting maul, etc. The gavel when used as a

working tool has a wooden handle, an iron head; at one end the head is hammer-shaped, at the other end it has a cutting edge. Such a tool was convenient for giving a first rough shape to a stone, and for that reason it is an appropriate tool to put into the hands of an apprentice, who is a beginner, and who, at the stage of his initiation when he receives it, is in a position to do little more than begin the first rough fashioning of himself for the Masonic life.

INITIATION

Here is one of the profoundest and most beautiful words in the whole nomenclature of Freemasonry. To understand it fully is almost to understand one-half of the philosophy of the Craft. In its present form, or in some of its most ancient forms, it is almost as old as the hills. Whatever its form, and however old any particular form of it may be, it has always had the general meaning of making a beginning, as when a man makes his beginning in life by being born. Hence such words as initial, initiate, initiatory, initiative. Throughout its many Masonic uses initiate presupposes that Freemasonry is in one sense a world, large, complex, and long-lasting; and in another sense, that it is a life to be lived in that world. It would mean, therefore, either that a man is being born into that Masonic world, or that he is beginning his life in that world.

LEVEL

This small word hides within its two syllables a cabinet of historical customs, poetries, and images. It began with the Latin word *libra*, which was a scale or balance, made with an arm from each end of which hung a pan or a weight. A small scale of that sort was called *libella*. The idea behind it was that an object is accurately weighed when the two ends of the arm are level with each other. *Libra* also was the name of a unit of weight, and our own abbreviation for the word pound (*lb.*) is a shortened form of it. Also *libra* was the name for the seventh sign of the zodiac. Again it is still almost universally used as a symbol for justice. The shape or details of a level are not its most important features; its great purpose, and regardless of the means used, is to test whether or not a surface is at all points exactly at right angles to the center of gravity.

LODGE

For a thousand years this has been one of the most versatile of words, both as noun and as verb. It has been used at one time or another to denote a hut, a tent, an arbor, a cottage, a loggia, a box-seat at a theater, a temporary structure, and in one of its many incarnations turned itself into the politician's word lobby. In all its forms, however, it has carried about with it the suggestion of a structure usually small, possibly temporary, one only half closed in, for occasional purposes, etc. The early Operative Masons erected a temporary building and called it a lodge; and since the body of men who met in it were lodged in it, they called the body of men a lodge. To this day Freemasons continue that practice, for they call the consecrated room in which Masons assemble "the lodge" (or lodge room), and at the same time give the same name to the body of the membership. (A small symbolic piece of furniture also is called "the lodge," though why it came to have that name continues to be a puzzle.)

MASON

Throughout the Middle Ages in Britain and in many parts of Europe any trained craftsman who made his living as a designer and builder of structures in stone or brick was called a mason. The same man today is called architect or builder. Modern Speculative Freemasonry had its origin among those early builders. The fact explains why Joseph Fort Newton gave the title of "The Builders" to his famous one-volume history of the Craft, which was written on a commission from the Grand Lodge of Iowa; and why The National Masonic Research Society called its monthly journal of Masonic studies "The Builder." (It also had its origin in Iowa.) Nobody has yet discovered the first origin of the word. Some authorities believe that it came from *machio*, a Latin word which gave us our word make; others that it came from a source which meant to cut, to carve; and yet others, that it came from a term which meant

to weave or put together, the source from which we have matter, mat, and matting. All these possible forms have one point in common: masonry was not a mere matter of cutting one stone, but meant that the craftsmen cut and shaped a stone to combine with other stones in a fabric or structure. (See under “Freemason.”)

MASTER

In the old Latin language the root mag had in general the meaning of great, large, imposing, chief, head of, executive, rulership. In the course of centuries, and from language to language, this developed into a large and varied family of words which differ much among themselves yet have in common one point of meaning. Magistrate, magisterial, magnitude, magnum, master, mister (written as Mr.), major, majesty, etc., are typical of many more. In Speculative Freemasonry the word is a part of the titles of the executive heads of the Grand Lodge and of the lodge, of the name of the third degree, and is used to denote a candidate who has mastered the art of Masonry. A man is the master of an art if he has complete rulership of his own hands and abilities and of the materials in which he works.

MONITOR

The word monere was employed for centuries with the general meaning of call to mind, to remind, and belonged to that large family of words to which such terms as mind and mental belong. To that general meaning there came in time another emphasis; not only was something called to mind, it was called to mind with a warning, namely, that if it was not learned a penalty would be exacted – hence the word admonish. A monitor in Freemasonry is a set of teachings or lectures, which are lawful to print, the purpose of which is instruction, information, explanation, usually about the Ritual.

MYSTERY

The word is an instance of itself because it has many meanings various enough to perplex the mind, and because it is almost impossible to define. In reality there are three or four different words spelled and pronounced alike. 1. One of these began with a Greek term which meant “to close the eyes” and therefore denoted something secret, hidden. 2. Another began with the Latin ministerium, and meant to minister to, as when a physician ministers to a patient, or a pastor ministers to his parish. 3. In the Middle Ages it was in common use to denote a skilled craft, therefore early masonry was often described as a mystery. 4. In the ancient world there were a number of organized religious societies which admitted members by initiation, used rites, symbols, ceremonies, and had secrets; they were called Mysteries. In lodge work and in Masonic literature together all four are in common use.

NOMINATION

The Latin nomen is preserved in English as name, and has been the source of a whole constellation of similar words, among which are two frequently used in Freemasonry: nomenclature and nominate. To nominate is to name, and usually it is to name a man for an office, or for membership on a committee. The nomenclature of Freemasonry consists of the names and words used by it; in practice, however, and among scholars, it is employed in the narrower sense of denoting a set of words (perhaps 200 of them in Ancient Craft Masonry) that are used largely in a special or in a technical sense. This nomenclature is a wonderful thing, the majority of words in it being not only ancient but *very* ancient, and among them are some of the most beautiful and interesting terms in any language.

OPERATIVE

Operative appears to carry about with it no aroma of poetry because it has a hard, harsh sound; but this ought not to be, because it is a word ancient, beautiful, and revealing. For two thousand years the root word opus, either when used alone or as part of another word, has always meant a piece of work done, a labor accomplished, a thing made. In music it is a name given to large compositions, and in literature is used of a book massive in size and scholarship. It is found in operate, operation, operator,

opera, etc. An Operative Freemason was thus so called because he made things with his own hands which were large things, called for long labors, and required much knowledge and skill. It is not easy when studying the early practices of the Craft to keep a sharp line of distinction between Operative and Speculative and between Speculative and Accepted. An Operative made things himself; the members of the Craft who drew plans, understood geometry, and did what would now be called “head work” were often called Speculatives. The Accepted Mason did none of the actual work on a building but was accepted into a lodge in very much the same way that a modern organization may accept an honorary member.

ORIENT

It has been estimated that between two-thirds and three-fourths of the words in English came from Latin, or through Latin, directly or indirectly. This word, like many others in these paragraphs, is one of many such instances; it is almost pure Latin as it stands. Oriens meant to rise, therefore the place of the sun’s rising was the east, the orient. A thing is said to be oriented in the literal sense when some principal axis or point in it faces the east; in a larger sense orientation means to be arranged according to some frame-work of directions. In America the Master’s station is called the East, the Grand Master’s is called the Grand East; in Europe, and for a similar reason, a Grand Body may be called a Grand Orient. A lodge is oriented east and west.

PENALTY

As far back as the known history of language goes, over the whole of Europe and even across the lands of the Near East, including a vast stretch of time covering four or five thousand years, this word, in one of its hundred forms, has always meant the infliction of pain for the purpose of restraint or punishment. During the Middle Ages, the period in which our Fraternity took form, the peoples had the general custom of making lists of crimes, and of having a set of penalties for each one. All of these together they divided into two large categories, crimes which were a form of treason, crimes which were a form of heresy; and in a general way the punishment for treason was some form of hanging, for heresy was some form of burning. The only penalties ever used in Freemasonry are rebuke, admonition, exclusion, suspension, expulsion, etc.

PLUMB

Plumbum was the Latin name for lead. The word has had many forms and uses. As plumbago it is both the name for oxide of lead, and for a plant. It appears in plumbing, and plumber. Under such names as plumb-bob, plumb-line, and plumb-rule it has for thousands of years been the simplest and one of the best devices for testing perpendiculars. A blob of lead is made symmetrical in shape; in the exact center of its top a cord is attached; the weight of the lead draws the cord downward in a straight line which is also perpendicular. (The plumb-line appears in a majestic form and under dramatic circumstance in the Scripture reading taken from the Book of Amos.)

PROFANE

In Freemasonry this word is used with a rigidly technical sense, and should never be used otherwise. It has nothing to do with profanity, nor does it ever mean that a profane is under contempt or in despite. No man should be affronted if Masons call him a profane. In ancient times a holy place was called oftentimes a fane, and around it was a boundary line, wall, hedge, or fence, within which was its “precinct.” Profane referred to anything beyond that boundary line. A man who is not a Mason, who is not entitled to enter a lodge, who must remain outside the lodge’s precincts, is a profane.

RELIEF

Here is one of those words in which the more literally it is defined the more poetry it is found to have within it, the more of beautiful images. It began with the Latin levare which meant to make light,

to lift up, and which gave us our words levity (light laughter), levitation, Levant, lighten, etc.; and when to it was added the prefix re it became relevare, a name given to carved work (“carved in relief”) in which the outlines are lifted above the surface into the light. From this it passed on to the more special meaning of making pain and suffering lighter, easier to bear. Masons, being normal men, and like all other normal men, have in the character with which they were born the normal feeling of giving, helping, assisting, freely and gladly, which goes under the general name of charity; but Masons also have a special form of helping, aiding, assisting which is called relief.

RITUAL

In the ancient Sanskrit speech which mothered so many of our modern languages the root word ri denoted something which was repetitive, which flowed along. Out of it, and in some instances long afterwards, came such words as rio, river, riparian, ratio, arithmetic, rite. The Latin ritus, from which rite is immediately derived, meant originally something put together in a pattern, something arranged, and this same pattern or arrangement was to be observed and preserved whenever it was repeated. From this long history of rite came to have the general meaning of a set of things to be observed ceremoniously, a system of things symbolic, allegoric, or emblematic to be enacted with solemnity. Necessary to this usage is the fact that the same set of things thus ceremoniously enacted is used over and over. A ritual is a system of rites.

SECRECY

In the Latin, secretus denoted something set apart, something separated. (Our “secretary” is a form of the same word; it means that a secretary does not keep records and correspondence in general, but private records and correspondence.) A secret, therefore, does not belong to the public in general but belongs to some individual, family, circle, group or association, and is not a secret to those to whom it belongs but is a secret to everybody else. In the Middle Ages each gild had its trade secrets, such as chemical, physical, and mathematical formulas, and each and every apprentice took an oath never to reveal them to outsiders. The early Freemasons had many such trade secrets. Masonic secrets belong privately to Masons and hence are kept from outsiders; but among Masons themselves there is nothing secret about them, each of them being as open as the day and as clear as the light.

SECRETARY

This word is first cousin to secret (see under “Secrecy”) because for many centuries that word denoted nothing more secret than the facts that something was confidential or private – why the word ever came to mean something occult, something that could not stand the light of day, is a mystery. A secretary was a servant or official who was in the private confidence of his employer, and as such looked after certain private forms of business for his employer, oftentimes in the way of correspondence and documents. A lodge secretary is the custodian of the private and confidential papers and records of his lodge. At the same time he is, in the Masonic system, a constitutional officer. Why? Because no lodge could be constituted without him. The actions taken by a lodge at an official communication but carry on (unless rescinded) through the indefinite future. It is as if the communication had not come to an end but had transferred itself to the pages of the minutes. Since the secretary prepares those minutes and is their official custodian his office is one of paramount importance, because the minutes are legally binding on the lodge as well as useful for historical purposes.

SPECULATIVE

A strange word is this, and if a biography could be written of a word as well as of a man the career of this word would be a checkered one. Our ancient forefathers called a look-out or a watch-tower by the name of specula. All the forms of the word have that same point of meaning in them: spectator, speculate, spectrum, speculative, speculum. Each of them has something to do with the eyes, with seeing, observing, looking about. In the largest sense speculative would therefore mean that a man is

looking about over as wide a stretch of country as he can see, or else is looking into as many things as possible. The early Operative Freemasons had in their Craft a group of craftsmen whose specialty it was to understand geometry, to draw plans, make templates, etc.; these oftentimes were called speculative Masons. (See under "Operative.") Speculative Masons according to that early meaning were working members of their Craft and made their living at it. Those who were admitted to membership but did not make their living at the building trade were called Accepted Masons. After the Mother Grand Lodge was erected in 1717 it was nowhere necessary for the member of a lodge to be an Operative Mason; all were "Accepted Masons," and at the same time, and because their Masonry was intellectual and spiritual, they were all "Speculative Masons."

SQUARE

The square as a working tool is but one of its many appearances and uses in the Rituals of the Craft – from certain points of view it is possibly the most widely known of all the symbols and emblems, and has passed into the familiar phraseology of the people in such expressions as "a square deal," "be square," etc. The history behind the word itself is so old and so complex that a large book could be written about it, but throughout its wanderings there has been one point of meaning common to all the forms and uses. The number four has been at the center of it. There are four straight lines, four right angles, four of this, that, or the other, hence such words as quadrangle, quadrilateral, quadratics, etc. Also, men always have been struck by the fact that a solid or figure square in shapes gives maximum equilibrium – it stays put, will not topple over, will not cave in, it is solid and substantial (in colloquial usage a solid and substantial meal is still called "a square meal"). For a Mason to be on the square means more, therefore, than for him to be truthful and honorable, though his character is of cardinal importance; he also is stable, is not flighty, can be relied on, stays put. (As a working tool, the square is a try-square, used for proving right angles; it should not be confused with the carpenter's square, which has inch marks along each arm.)

STEWARD

This very curious word appears to be a relic left over out of some unknown language of the early periods of northern Europe. It very possibly began as the combination of two words. Stig meant a sty, or pen, in which animals were kept; and a crib, bin, storage room in which provisions were kept. Weard (see under "Warden") was a guard, a watchman, an overseer. Out of this combination came steward as the title of an officer appointed to have charge of food, provisions, clothing, etc. It is a revealing fact that when the Mother Grand Lodge of the world was erected in 1717 it began with no Grand Officers except Grand Master and the two Grand Wardens, but almost immediately began to appoint Grand Stewards. Their function was to prepare and serve the quarterly Grand Lodge feasts, and it was considered so great an honor that lodges were glad to pay a high fee to have a member appointed. In the present time the lodge office of steward has had its functions very much narrowed down.

SYMBOL

This is one of the most curious words in the English language, partly because of the way in which it was first formed, partly because it has departed so far from its original meaning. The ancient Greek symbolon was formed of two words, one of which meant "to put together," the other of which meant "to throw." (Our ball and ballistics came from the latter of the two.) The idea seems to have been that if certain things were put together, or thrown together, or combined, and regardless of how much they differed among themselves, they could form a single pattern or picture, as in mosaic. This led through a series of steps, too many to trace, to the modern meaning. A symbol is a device usually made of details put together, or thrown together, which stands for or signifies some idea, truth, teaching, or doctrine. That which it stands for has no similarity to the symbol itself, as, to use one illustration only, The Letter G when used as a symbol for geometry has no similarity to geometry. In this respect it differs

fundamentally from an emblem because the letter is itself an instance of that for which it stands. (See under “Emblem.”)

TEMPLE

Among the ancient Greeks and Romans the people frequently had places for reverence or worship which they walled off, or otherwise enclosed. To such an enclosure the Greeks gave the name temenos, the Romans the name templum. It is believed that in the earliest periods templum was used as the name of the whole enclosure, the building included, but that later on it was confined to the building alone. A temple was designed exclusively for the purposes of public worship. The Books of Kings and of Chronicles give the impression that at the time when they were written it was the whole enclosure, and not the building alone, which was called Solomon’s Temple. It is a point which makes clear many things in the Second Degree.

TENET

This has the sound and look of a thin and tenuous word but within itself, and when correctly used, has color, surprise, drama. The Latin tenere meant more than to take hold of; it meant rather to seize, to grasp, to clutch, to hang on, and if necessary to struggle to hang on. It passed into English almost unchanged in our tense, tendon, tension, tenor (so called because it was the voice that held the lead), tensor, tenacious. A tenet is some idea, belief, doctrine which the mind takes hold of tenaciously, will not let go, holds a firm grip; and an idea of belief of which this is possible is said to be tenable. In Freemasonry the Principal Tenets (there are many other tenets) are Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth, and they are so called because in no place or time, under any circumstances, will Freemasons let them go.

TREASURER

Nowadays a thesaurus is a volume containing thousands of words arranged in the form of families, all of the members of each family having in common at least one point of meaning. The ancient Greeks used thesaurus with a much wider meaning; it was the name for a chest, room, etc., in which things were kept, usually things of value. Out of that long usage came our treasury or treasurer. A lodge treasurer, like the secretary, is a constitutional officer because it would be impossible to constitute (which in essence means to organize as well as to maintain) a Masonic lodge without providing for his function, since no lodge could operate without funds, and no funds would long remain intact without a man to care for them, to be responsible for them, and to receive or disburse them on official mandates from the lodge.

TRESTLE-BOARD

This is a word seldom found outside of Freemasonry in present times, though it was common enough centuries ago. Its use in the Craft is somewhat confusing because no fewer than four different names have at one time or another been used almost synonymously, trestle-board, tracing-board, tracing-cloth, and floor-carpet. Masonic history helps somewhat to clear up this confusion. Operative Freemasons had the practice of drawing designs on a board of white deal, and of sandpapering the design off after it has served its purpose. This was called an “easterling board” in early years, afterwards was called a tracing-board. If such a board was set on trestles it was called a trestle-board. After written Old Charges came into use they were often summarized in pictorial form on such a board (sometimes painted) or else were drawn or painted on a floor-cloth, or floor-carpet. In some of the early Speculative lodges objects were placed on a board supported by trestles, and the lectures referred to them; this also was called a trestle-board. These various uses have in common the one point that they represent in the form of diagrams or pictures certain things in the Work or in the Old Charges.

TROWEL

Strange have been the ways of words, this one among many others! At a time long before the Greeks there was a word which meant “to stir.” The Greeks themselves adopted it as the name for a spoon or ladle with which a woman stirred a pot. When it was taken over into Latin this became trua, a flat ladle, a small-sized one being called trulla. The latter word traveled across French into English and there became the word trowel. In the meantime, one of its usages got itself transformed into the word stir; another became storm, which is a stirring up of the air. Stir and storm appear to be worlds away from the trowel that was used by the operative mason, and which had a point, a flat blade, and an offset handle; even so, he maintained two of the original meanings, for he used his implement to stir up his cement to a smooth consistency, and to ladle it onto the stone. It came in time to signify the last step in constructing a wall, and therefore is an appropriate working tool for the last degree in Ancient Craft Masonry.

WARDEN

Warden began as the fine old Anglo-Saxon word weard, which meant to watch, so that the warden was a guard, a watchman, a custodian of something, as when a watchman of the timber was called a wood warden, of the hay was called a hay warden, etc. The two wardens in a lodge watch, or oversee, the activities which center in their stations, and both of them assist the Master to rule and govern his lodge. Traditionally the Senior Warden oversees (“watches over”) the Craft while at labor, the Junior Warden oversees the Craft during the hours when at refreshment. Traditionally, the latter is a constitutional lodge officer whose duty is to arrange for social affairs, parties, entertainments, and at one time he had stewards to assist him; why his duties were made over to special and standing social committees no historian can explain.

WORD

Among all the 400,000 or so words in our magnificent English language no other one is more difficult to define, or has behind it a more complex history, than word itself. Thus, and to use two examples at random, the ancient Greeks had it as rhetor, which denoted a speaker, and from which we have rhetoric and rhetorician; and the Latin-speaking peoples had it as verbum, from which we have verb, verbal, etc. It found its way into nearly all of the European languages. In those many countries and through these many centuries it has always had something to denote about speech. A word is a unit of speech. With a meaning so fundamental it came inevitably into use for many other purposes, poetic, allegoric, symbolic, emblematic, philosophic. The Fourth Gospel begins with “In the beginning was the Word.” The prophet began with, “The word of Jehovah.” Theologians describe the Holy Bible as “God’s Word.” It is a sign of veracity, as in the phrase, “gentlemen do not doubt each others’ word.” It means a body of knowledge, as in the sentence, “The Word Was Lost.” It stands for news, as in “I have received word from him recently.” It is a secret password. It may be used as a test, as in shibboleth and sibboleth.

WORSHIPFUL

This extraordinary interesting old word has within itself a structure so peculiar that it is not believed to be in use in any language save English. The Anglo-Saxon weorth meant something of value, something of high place, something to be respected or revered. Ship is an old Teutonic term (as here used) which meant to make, to create, to ordain. The suffix ful means full, to fill up. When those three words were melted together in one word, worshipful came to mean a man who held a position which was to be honored, respected, revered, and obeyed. For many centuries throughout the Middle Ages it was one of the commonest of honorific titles, and to this day is still used in England with something of the sense with which “sir” is used in America. The executive heads of both the Grand Lodge and the lodge are given the title of worshipful because each is the incumbent of an office that in Freemasonry is obeyed, respected, and honored.

