

THE WINDING STAIRS

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Masonry is defined as "a beautiful system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols." The wealth of that symbolism is not only varied, but each provides a portion in the Masonic building known as CHARACTER. Thus we have the Ashlars, the Sprig of Acacia, the Square and Compasses and the Winding Stairs, to mention but a few, though each one contributing something towards the temple of inward growth of grace and personality.

An outstanding symbol in the F. C. degree is the flight of the Winding Stairs. In the V. S. L. we read, "they went up the Winding Stairs into the Middle Chamber." We travel also up a winding stairs of life climbing steadily from birth, childhood, and ascend to the Sanctum Sanctorum in which our souls find rest.

There is symbolism in the fact that the stairs WIND. A straight stairway hides neither mystery or secret. However, the winding stairs obscures from view that which is around the corner. To climb the winding stairs then implies we must exercise courage, determination and above all else - faith. The Winding Stairs leads us into the middle chamber of good or ill, or in other words, the unpredictable. Man climbs to new realms of civilization and to spiritual enlightenment. Each must climb, though the individual experience may be vastly different from that of anyone else.

"A man's reach must exceed his grasp
Else what's a heaven for?"

So wrote the poet Browning. Longfellow expressed the same thoughts in his interpretation:

"The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight
But they while their companions slept
Were upward climbing in the night."

Man climbs because he has courage; because he has faith urged on by a Divine discontent just because he is a MAN. By the same token so must the Freemason climb for the winding stairs DO lead somewhere. There IS a middle chamber. There ARE wages to be earned by the fellowcraft. He climbs in faith because he believes.

The Winding Stairs ties and disciplines a man's soul. He must BELIEVE, otherwise no summit will ever be scaled. He must climb in faith that there is a summit, and where that upward climb is undertaken in sincerity, he eventually reached the coveted goal. Now all this is symbolical of life and manhood. No one knows whether the top will ever be reached or not, but nevertheless he climbs in faith and hope that the middle chamber of ardent desire may be the joy and the satisfaction of achievement.

And so the F. C. degree is one of action - climbing and rising on the rungs of knowledge to the Arts and the Sciences. The Degree is emblematic of the struggle of life not only materially but spiritually as well. This adventurous climb is not intended for the drone of the laggard, but rather for the fighter and the adventurer and the man of a stout heart. The F. C. must be equipped with high and indomitable courage for the achievement is worth fighting for.

Many may pass through this Degree and see only a beautiful ceremony - something which attracts our attention but may not supply any lasting truth. The thoughtful Mason sees in the Winding Stairs an invitation to climb into great realities; it is an incentive to know

more of the sublime mysteries and a spur to reach the Middle Chamber. The Winding Stairs is a progressive step to reach that exalted Degree of a Master Mason, and so fit and prepare himself to reach up to and commune with his Divine Creator.