

The Winding Staircase

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In the course of the development of our ceremonies, parts of our Ritual have acquired an esoteric, as well as an Exoteric meaning, and now some things have as many as four or five hidden interpretations, the innermost of which can be understood only when the Candidate has assimilated the rest. The Winding Staircase, as generally portrayed on the T.B., is a noble structure, with its use both obvious and described in the Ritual, namely to enable F.C.'s to reach the Middle Chamber. However, there does not seem to be any evidence that such a staircase existed in this actual form. The reference in the V.S.L. (1 Kings 6, V.8) appears to describe a narrow, winding stairway, similar to those found in the walls of old castles, and serving a like purpose in merely giving access to the second and third stories of the "chambers round about" (verses 5 and 6); these latter were built into the walls surrounding the main court of the Temple and the Holy Place, which together formed to ground plan. Such a stairway would, almost certainly, have more than seven steps; possibly there were fifteen (3,5,7) as in a later Temple. The Ritual covers this apparent divergence from history by an allegorical dissertation on the numbers 3, 5 & 7, and this is all the explanation we get in this part of the Ritual or Lectures; a further hint is given in the third degree by the reference to the Candidate being "conducted" through the intricate windings of this mortal life." Obviously, then, an actual structure has been spiritualized, and we must search for a further esoterically meaning if we are to appreciate the reason why this staircase now occupies such an important place. Speculative Freemasonry, as we know it today, combines the inner teaching of all the great religions, rites and mysteries; it epitomizes the unending quest of man, which is to find, and identify himself with the Deity. This progressive search is symbolized in the stairway, and in the peculiar manner of approaching the E. in this degree. In the latter case we ascend but five steps, which may represent our five physical senses, the spiral nature of these steps implying that we circle the Divine Center by trampling on each of these senses and bringing them under control. It is only by subjugation of our passions and senses, one by one, that we can use them as steps to ascend to the Inner Chamber of Perfection, and approach the Sacred Symbol, which later is represented by the Three Great Lights. Thus we see that the Winding Staircase is really emblematical of our whole conduct through life, and typifies our progress, which should be ever upward., So we should ascend from ignorance at our birth (as E.A.'s), by a careful study of the mysteries of nature and science (as F.C.'s) to the ultimate realization of our goal, which can be attained only by these experiences and revelations which yet await us, symbolized in the third degree, and beyond.