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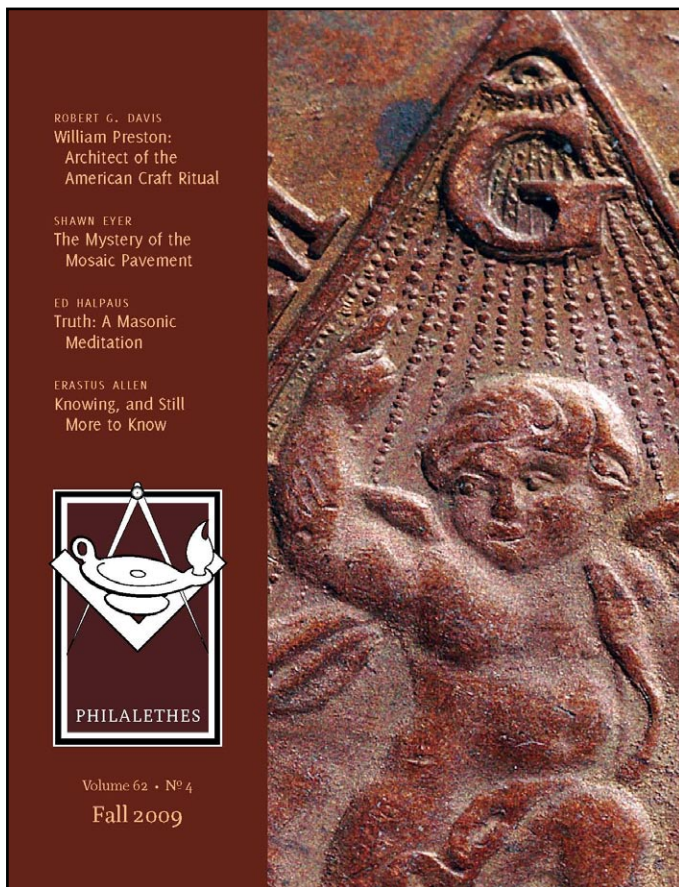


Sample Article from Volume 62 • Nº 4

ERASTUS ALLEN

Knowing, and Still More to Know

A fascinating meditation on the intellectual and philosophical growth of the Fellow Craft Mason, his challenges and opportunities.



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Knowing, and Still More to Know

ERASTUS ALLEN SHEDS LIGHT UPON THE WORK OF THE FELLOW CRAFT

One direction given to a Fellow Craft candidate differs in a fundamental way from those given in the Entered Apprentice or Master Mason degrees. This key requirement of the second degree extends the reinforcement of moral behavior into the realm of the mind. It does not tell the candidate how to be or behave. Instead, it gives instruction that leads the obliging candidate on a quest for sustained mental growth. William Preston describes the first degree as “intended to enforce the duties of morality” while the second degree “extends the plan” to “a more diffusive system of knowledge.”¹ The instruction that extends the plan is the study of the liberal arts and sciences.

To act upon the square, to walk uprightly, to keep well what is entrusted to us: these are the duties every candidate accepts. They are virtues to accept and live by, and his adherence to them is a matter of character. By contrast, the study of the liberal arts requires “self-starter” motivation, patience, and effort. We must also overcome some misconceptions, as it is easy to forget that the “worldly” benefits of the liberal arts are mentioned by our tradition only as a preparation for higher applications.

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After all, the *artes liberales* were so named because they are suitable to free men whereas the *artes iliberales* imparted vocational know-how suitable for craftsmen and laborers. We are free men today, but education is pursued predominantly with an eye toward gainful employment. Even the best universities have been gradually dismantling the liberal arts approach in favor of an increasingly vocational mission, and students tend to understand their collegiate studies merely as a means to a career.

Today, men who work full-time in the United States devote 4–5 hours to leisure activities each day. Further, more than half of this time is spent in passive leisure activities such as watching television.² The modern-day Fellow Craft should realize that while we have free time, *we are only as free as we are capable of using it*. Freemasonry warns us to subdue our “passions,” and most of us understand this word in the sense of unruly emotions. But it shares the same root as “passive,” and as late as 1828 its primary definition was “the impression or effect of an external agent upon a body; that which is suffered or received.”³ A Mason’s duty to avoid the indulgence in passive, idle habits is more likely how the authors of our degrees understood this admonition.

Psychologist Abraham Maslow understood that we are motivated by needs, and he formalized these drives into a hierarchy from basic physical needs to self-actualization⁴ and even, as he found later: self-

transcendence. From our first rational thoughts as a species, exploring cause and effect to track animal prey,⁵ to the latest industrial innovations, our progress in science has been motivated by the basic needs. In addition, the properly motivated Fellow Craft is mindful of the need for spiritual fulfillment. This need, however, has only in modern times required a distinct expression when the mysteries of nature and mysteries of the divine suffered a divorce due to seemingly irreconcilable differences.

While a candidate might fear that studying Grammar, Rhetoric, Logic, Arithmetic, Geometry, Music and Astronomy is simply too much to do, Preston taught that Masonry does not make this demand. A Fellow Craft is to be engaged in “not all systems of sciences ancient and modern (this would be a stupendous undertaking) but only that system of sciences arranged by our ancestors to make general classes for learning; and be capable of admitting every new discovery.”⁶

The desired result is not to learn everything there is to know, but to enable the *process of discovery* itself. This describes the implementation of a framework that makes us vessels generally capable of receiving knowledge: not an education, as Ralph Waldo Emerson might have said, but a means to an education. And learning is ultimately not a mundane pursuit, but a means toward sacred knowledge and a deeper regard for the holy. This idea is affirmed in the British Emulation Rite, when the candidate is instructed to “make the liberal arts and sciences your future study” in order to “estimate the wonderful works of the Almighty.”

The direction of the Fellow Craft’s attention toward the development of divine awe and reverence finds powerful expression in the words of many early brethren. One example from 1790 is the *Fellow-Craft Hymn for the use of Holland Lodge* by Brother Samuel Low. This poem dramatically likens the

Fellow Craft’s quest to the operation of the Sun:

See the Sun majestic rise!
See him gain meridian skies!
Now his Glory sets in night,
Soon again to bless our sight:
Thus our Brother’s mind shall grow,
Knowing, and still more to know,
’Till illum’d, the mental eye,
Phoebus-like, shall mount the sky.⁷

Maslow’s later work found a level of development beyond actualization: self-transcendence. Attributes of those operating at this level included humility, a sustained experience of Being and of “unitive consciousness” and, perhaps most striking, a “positive correlation — rather than the more usual inverse one — between increasing knowledge and increasing mystery and awe.”⁸ If our Masonic formula, which shares the same positive link between knowledge and divine reverence, yields similar results, perhaps a renewed zeal for this charge to the Fellow Craft will be found: not to try to understand everything, but to capably receive as much as possible the divine gift of everything that is.

NOTES

1. Colin Dyer, *William Preston and His Work* (Shepperton, UK: Lewis Masonic, 1987), 212.
2. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *American Time Use Survey Summary*, Table 11 <http://www.bls.gov/tus/>
3. Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Converse, 1828).
4. Abraham Maslow, A Theory of Human Motivation, *Psychological Review* 50(4) (1943):370–96.
5. Louis Liebenberg, *The Art of Tracking: The Origin of Science* (Cape Town: David Philip), 45.
6. Dyer, op. cit., 212.
7. Samuel Low, *Fellow-Craft Hymn for the use of Holland Lodge* (New York: John Harrisson & Stephen Purdy, 1790).
8. Abraham Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, (New York: Viking, 1972).

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