

The Meaning of Masonry

W. L. Wilmshurst's *The Meaning of Masonry* is a classic. First published in 1922, *The Meaning of Masonry* has challenged and encouraged Masons for nearly a century to look beyond the exoteric explanations and meanings assigned to the symbols and lectures of the Craft. Greater understanding of the aim and purpose of Masonry is available to those who genuinely search for it. Worshipful Bro. Kevin L. Schneider, Junior Deacon of William O. Ware Lodge of Research and a Past Master of Bradford Lodge No. 123 and Good Faith Lodge No. 95, offers the following review of *The Meaning of Masonry*.

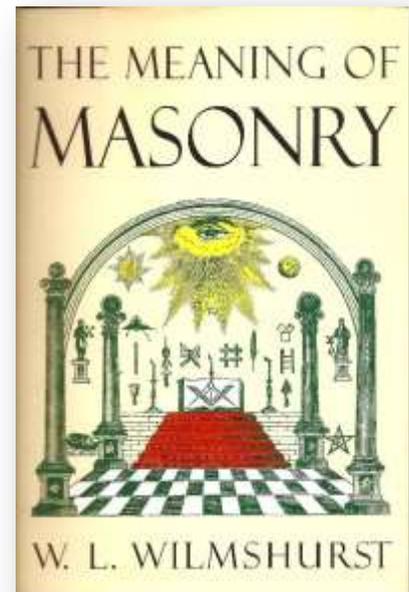
In his 1958 address to the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, Grand Master William O. Ware stated, "It is my firm conviction that, unless we, as members of this Ancient and Honorable Fraternity, become grounded in the true purpose and intent of the Fraternity, i.e., educated to its real meaning, we shall never see the Fraternity accomplish that for which it was founded." (The Grand Lodge of Kentucky F.&A.M., 68) He then proceeds to immediately quote Brother W. L. Wilmshurst who had eloquently expressed similar thoughts, three decades prior.

Grand Master Ware posed three questions to the craft, during his year of traveling to the subordinate lodges in Kentucky; one being: "What is Freemasonry?" This year, our namesake Lodge of Research is specifically addressing these questions propounded by MWGM Ware. In endeavoring to answer his first question, what better way to begin than by exploring the work that the Grand Master cited and recommended, *The Meaning of Masonry*.

The Meaning of Masonry consists of an Introduction by Wilmshurst and five "Chapters". The introduction alone is inspiring, in that it provides hope for those in the Craft, who have sought the benefits that membership promised and have found themselves disappointed to find the simple social or charitable gathering that many lodges have become. It is a refreshing sip for those who are really in thirst for the Secrets.

In his opening Chapter, The Deeper Symbolism of Masonry, the author presents the case, specifically, that Masonry "offers us in dramatic form and by means of dramatic ceremonial a philosophy of the spiritual life of man" and a "diagram for the process of regeneration" that is "consistent with every religious system that is taught outside of the Order" (Wilmshurst, 27). Additionally, he expounds upon benefits which our teachings can offer to its initiates.

In the second Chapter Wilmshurst discusses, Masonry as a Philosophy. Here he addresses in greater depth the completeness of Masonry as "a working philosophy for those brought within its influence" that answers the "need to those who are earnestly enquiring into the purpose and destiny of human life"



(Wilmshurst, 63). He discusses the spectrum of lessons offered by the ritual, while addressing the *allegorical* nature of our rituals; and within this section he details why the candidate seeking light **must** undergo self-abnegation (as taught by the working tools) and the mental preparation (the Seven Liberal Arts & Sciences) to achieve the breadth of understanding which our system offers.

The third Chapter contains his Further Notes on Craft Symbolism. Herein, Wilmshurst elaborates further on the specific purpose of each of the Three Degrees. He explores how our Symbols teach the Philosophy (described in the previous chapter) and guide us to the Work which must be performed for our purification -and- to train our mind to be able to perceive the depth of the designs of the Great Geometrician. Once completed, the Mason will have raised himself to be truly the Dedicated Servant for which the Master prayed during the Initiation.

In the following Chapter, Wilmshurst, being a British Mason, expounds upon the wisdom offered in the Royal Arch. This Wisdom is more than the attainment of a simple “Word,” as offered in some present Royal Arch Chapters. To obtain the benefits of the Royal Arch requires that “its candidate has passed through a long, strenuous period of purification and mental discipline” (Wilmshurst, 144). Only after this, can one be open to the revelation of the complete depth of his relationship to the Great Architect and thus know the True Word.

In the final Chapter, our Brother presents a discussion on The Relationship of Masonry to the Ancient Mysteries. In the introduction to this book, Wilmshurst asserts that Masonry is but a “modern” adaptation of the same path for those seeking enlightenment, as that which has been taught since time immemorial. By his own admission, this chapter was the most difficult for our Brother to pen. The historical documentation connecting our Mystery School to those of the past is, for all intents and purposes, non-existent. However, Wilmshurst definitively shows the connections and similarities to the schools of ancient Greece, those of the Egyptian, and even to the philosophical underpinnings of the Judeo-Christian religions. This section will be of limited interest to those seeking to understand the historical origins of our Craft. But to this reader, it is insignificant to the information proffered in the rest of the work.

In summary, Most Worshipful William O. Ware gave us wise counsel that this book is a must read for those Brothers, who are seeking to understand the deeper purpose of our Craft. It describes a path and process, which guides the reader to be able to operatively find Light. However, be forewarned of the approaching danger which might befall you, should you choose to proceed.

This book must be consumed in small segments (fewer than five pages in a sitting) to truly appreciate the totality of its contents. Wilmshurst’s work will, if fully understood, answer many previously unanswered questions. *The Meaning of Masonry* could (and should) serve as the basis for quality education topics for the Lodge.

It is probable that Wilmshurst will also send you down many rabbit-holes in your quest for Masonic knowledge. It is even more likely that you will certainly no longer be satisfied with the trivial explanation of our “mysteries,” as taught in the typical lodge. And it is certain that the reader will never again see Masonry as superficial, after reading this work.

The Meaning of Masonry is readily available from most major online retailers.