

# The Lost Word of Freemasonry

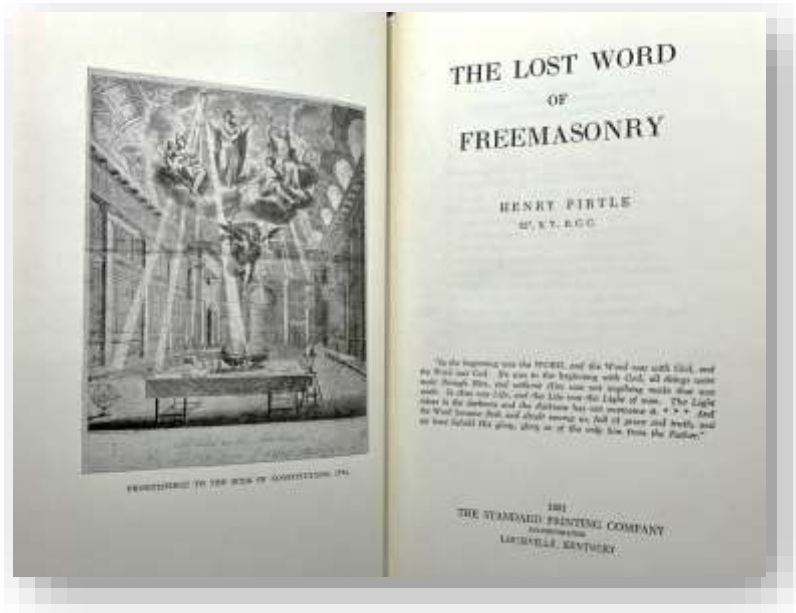
By Henry Pirtle

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Henry Pirtle is known chiefly among Kentucky Freemasons as the author of the *Kentucky Monitor*, one of the ritual guides approved by the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, F. & A. M.

Worshipful Brother Pirtle had a distinguished Masonic career, having authored a version of the constitution of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, and later serving as editor of “The Masonic Home Journal.”

In 1951, only four years prior to his death, W. B. Pirtle published *The Lost Word of Freemasonry*. One is left with the impression that, after publishing the *Kentucky Monitor* in 1921, W. B. Pirtle spent the next thirty years in contemplation of the deeper meaning of the rituals he had previously arranged. This book, largely lost to history, should easily be the work for which he is best known. Both accessible and skillfully written, *The Lost Word of Freemasonry* is a brilliant exploration of the ultimate quest of each Mason, which, as defined by W. B. Pirtle, “is that of the soul after God.”



Drawing on examples from folklore, religious traditions and several different schools of philosophy, Pirtle demonstrates how Freemasonry incorporates a “Quest-formula” into its mysteries. For the Freemason, the quest is the recovery of the “lost word,” which, according to Pirtle, is the name of God.

In much the same vein as Albert Pike and Albert Mackey, both of whom are frequently cited, Pirtle depicts the manner

in which the religions of the world, whether ancient or contemporary, share common elements. Many of those same elements have found their way into Freemasonry, and now form a part of our traditions, especially the legend of Hiram Abif.

In Pirtle's analysis of the "Quest-formula," he explains to the reader that the similarities in the world's various religions and traditions are evidence of the universality of man's innate desire to understand the identity and nature of his Creator. The parallels between ancient and contemporary religions are clearly drawn and give rich context to Pirtle's narrative.

Pirtle asserts that the search for the Lost Word and the search for light in Masonry are one and the same. In his analysis, the Lost Word is eternal, creative, redemptive and illuminative. Describing the immediate presence of God within our ceremonies, he writes that when a Master declares a Lodge to be open, "In the Name of God and the Holy Saints John," then "Truly the Spirit of Masonry descends upon that Lodge and the True Word is in the midst of them to bless them."

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In his chapter titled, "Magic in Names," W. B. Pirtle recounts examples from various cultures that ascribe unique powers to the true names of persons and things. It is believed in such cultures that to know the true name of a person or thing is to possess power over them or it. In certain societies, an individual may be given a "true" name at birth, which is never (or at least rarely) ever spoken again. Pirtle recites certain scriptures and other traditions that explain, in part, that man's quest to learn the true name of Deity is at least partially an effort to access and invoke the power of the Deity.

His chapter on the Jewish Cabala contains many interesting allusions, especially his commentary on that most familiar Masonic symbol, the point within a circle. W. B. Pirtle's interpretation of what (or who) the point represents is somewhat of a departure from the usual teachings of Freemasonry (even from the lectures that appear in his *Kentucky Monitor*). It is, however, an absolutely plausible interpretation and should be given serious consideration.

Perhaps the most intriguing chapter in *The Lost Word of Freemasonry* is "Whom the Candidate Represents." Continuing with the symbol of the point within the circle, W. B. Pirtle takes the reader on a journey through astronomy (the signs of the Zodiac), the science of geometry (as an ancient mystery school), and comparative religion. It should be noted that nowhere in this work does Pirtle suggest or otherwise assert that Freemasonry is a religion. He does, however, effectively demonstrate the extent to which the religions of the world, to some extent, emulate each other; and how those similar traditions have been woven into the fabric of Freemasonry.

In the final chapter, "Hiram Rises As Christ," W. B. Pirtle examines the death and resurrection myths of each of the great world religions and compares them to the Masonic legend of Hiram. It is

in this chapter that W. B. Pirtle delivers his conclusions as to the essence of “The Lost Word of Freemasonry.”

It seems safe to say that *The Lost Word of Freemasonry* takes some of the themes expressed in the *Kentucky Monitor* and more fully develops them. Pirtle frequently uses the work of Arthur Edward Waite to buttress his positions. Like Waite, Pirtle reveals himself to be very much a man in search of a mystical spiritual illumination.

Pirtle wrote that man’s ability to understand Deity is limited because man is a creature of finite capacity, while Deity is infinite in all respects. Yet, man engages in the quest to understand Deity, and Freemasonry is one avenue in which to do so. **The Lost Word of Freemasonry** does much to provide necessary historical and spiritual context for the Mason’s quest.

The greatest accomplishment of **The Lost Word of Freemasonry** is the manner in which it synthesizes the myths of world religions and illustrates how those myths were incorporated into Masonic tradition. Through the explanation of many Masonic symbols, it becomes clear that the Mason’s quest is identical to mankind’s ancient quest for understanding of the Creator, and his place within the Creation.

The *Lost Word of Freemasonry* is a well-crafted, well organized and logical effort to address the ultimate Masonic quest – an understanding of the nature of Deity. Throughout the book, Pirtle demonstrates his mastery of Masonic texts and the work of Masonic scholars of previous centuries. Based on this volume, Henry Pirtle is entitled to take his place along those scholars. To say that W. B. Pirtle’s work should be better known is an understatement.

**The Lost Word of Freemasonry** is for the contemplative Freemason who is willing to invest the time and mental energy needed to process Pirtle’s persuasive arguments. For those who are willing to examine W. B. Pirtle’s work, Masonic light can be found within its pages.

**The Lost Word of Freemasonry** is long out of print. Copies are quite rare and should be preserved carefully. It remains available from online booksellers in print-on-demand editions.