

Corn, Wine and Oil

THE WAGES OF A FELLOWCRAFT

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The meaning and significance of the phrase "corn, wine, and oil" began as a response to my puzzlement over the Fellowcraft lecture reference to "corn, wine, and oil as the wages of a Fellowcraft. I wondered why those three particular items. My search involved reviewing the use of symbolism, looking at the meaning of each item separately, and looking at the meaning of the comprehensive phrase. Throughout history symbols have been utilized by the people as a means of facilitating communication. Before the advent of an alphabet symbols were the only means available to convey written messages. The invention of the first alphabet was, in fact, the development of a set of symbols designed to make it possible to communicate easily in writing. However, it was many years before books were available for all but a very few persons. Consequently, most people could not read and were dependent upon symbols as one of the important ways to learn the lessons of religion and life.

With the advent of the printed word which resulted in the increased availability of books and increased literacy, the importance of religious symbols as a teacher of people decreased. This resulted in setting the stage for the development of "speculative" or "accepted" Masons, who continued to make extensive use of symbols to teach their lessons. Corn is commonly used as a symbol of nourishment, resurrection, and plenty. Its use as a symbol of nourishment comes obviously from the fact that corn refers to the principal cereal crop of an area. Since corn must be consumed to provide nourishment, it may be regarded by some as a symbol of sacrifice. Others see it as transformed into a higher form of life as it is consumed. The fact that a grain seed seems to die in the ground during the winter but emerges as a new life in the springtime gives rise to the use of corn as a symbol of resurrection. Corn derives its use as a symbol of plenty from the observation that when corn is scattered upon the ground it grows and develops producing more. The use of corn as a symbol of plenty also embodies its use as a symbol of nourishment and of resurrection, the germ of life which survives all destructive forces of nature and emerges into newness of life. Freemasonry today refers to corn, wine, and oil in the Fellowcraft degree and uses corn, wine, and oil in three of its rituals: the consecration of a lodge, the dedication of a Masonic Temple or hall, and the laying of a cornerstone. In the Fellowcraft degree, the wages of corn, wine, and oil as those of a Fellowcraft symbolizes the fact that the laborer is worthy of his hire. As a Fellowcraft bears the responsibilities and does the work of a man he is entitled to a just reward physically and spiritually. Corn, wine, and oil are used in the rituals of consecrating a lodge, dedicating a Masonic Temple, and the laying of a cornerstone as elements of consecration. That is they are used as symbols of setting a part of the Lodge, the Temple, or the building for a special purpose. Since Masonic symbolism is so closely associated with the Bible, wheat the corn of Biblical lands is used as corn in Masonic ceremonies. In the ceremony of consecrating a Lodge the following words which accompany the pouring of the corn, wine, and oil upon the "Lodge", the emblem of the Holy Ark, indicate the symbolism associated with their use, "I pour this corn, the emblem of nourishment, and consecrate this

Lodge to charity ... I pour this wine, the emblem of refreshment, and consecrate this Lodge to hope. . . . I pour this oil, the emblem of joy, and consecrate this Lodge to faith.

"Wherefore, my brethren, ... do you carry corn, wine, and oil in your processions, but to remind you that in your pilgrimage of human life you are to impart a portion of your bread to feed the hungry, to send a cup of wine to cheer the sorrowful, and to pour the healing oil of your consolation into the wounds which sickness hath made in the bodies of your fellow travelers?"

When a Masonic Temple is dedicated as a place to be used for Masonic purposes, the statements made as the corn, wine, and oil are presented and poured upon the "Lodge", indicate the same symbolism of nourishment, refreshment, and joy as in the ceremony of consecration of a Lodge. The symbolism in the laying of a cornerstone is set forth in the words of consecration used as each element is poured upon the cornerstone. "I scatter this corn as an emblem of plenty. May the blessings of heaven be showered upon us ... I pour this wine as an emblem of joy and gladness ... I pour this oil as an emblem of peace." The concluding prayer adds the symbolism associated with consecration and dedication, "grant to us all a supply of the corn of nourishment, the wine of refreshment and the oil of joy." The symbolism related to corn, wine and oil is some of the oldest in Masonic use. Corn the symbol of nourishment and plenty, wine the symbol of refreshment and gladness, and oil the symbol of joy and peace together represent the Masonic elements of consecration.

As a result there is no doubt that corn, wine, and oil seem to be most appropriate as the wages of a Fellowcraft.