



AN INVITATION TO ROYAL ARCH MASONRY

The explanation of the Degrees of Royal Arch Masonry and their direct tie with the unfinished story portrayed in the Master Mason Degree. Contrary to the misconception that Masonry consists only of the three Degrees of the symbolic lodge, this brochure will "enlighten" you to the fact that there is much more to that story available to you.

At one time the Royal Arch Degree was a part of the Master Mason Degree but was available only to Past Masters. All of the degrees conferred in the Chapter are a continuation of what you have been taught in the symbolic lodge. In fact, you finally discover that which was lost.

Although these degrees are not mandatory for Master Masons, they are available to those who wish to improve themselves in masonry. Every Master Mason who appreciates the beginning of the story will surely value its wondrous completion.

The great object of Masonry is sometimes expressed as a search for that which was lost and which by our own endeavors and the assistance of the Master we hope to find. Coincident with this search (and an essential element in its success) is the erection of the temple of our soul of which the erection of King Solomon's Temple is the symbol. At the same time the tools, implements and methods of the operative Mason are symbols of the tools, implements and methods we are to use in the erection of our spiritual temple. However, all Masonic instruction is not confined to the three degrees of the symbolic lodge

MARK MASTER MASON DEGREE

The primary lessons brought out in the ethical teaching of the Blue Lodge have chiefly to do with certain states and conditions in the moral sphere, with transitions, and with the appointed means of transition from one state to another. For example, in the Entered Apprentice Degree there is the transition from "darkness to light," in the Fellow Craft from "ignorance to knowledge," and in the Master Mason from "death to life." Certainly nothing can be more important or necessary than these lessons.

But surely these lessons do not embrace all we have to learn and practice as Masons, and the moment we enter the Chapter this becomes evident. We experience a transition similar to that which the student experiences in passing from college to the professional school. We are brought face to face with the practical side of life, and the first lesson taught us is that of work, industry and diligence. The candidate in the Mark

Master Mason degree makes his first entrance as a worker in the "quarries." Note the contrast. As an Entered Apprentice he is conducted in-blind, helpless and destitute. This symbolizes his moral and spiritual condition-without help and enlightenment. He is straightway taught what must be done for him. That he may receive such help and enlightenment he is "conducted" to the center of the Lodge for the benefit of prayer.

But in the Mark Master Mason degree he enters as a fellow craft, a worker, and is thereby taught what he must now do for himself; and furthermore, how he must do it. The truth that life is energy, and that a man is what his performance is, proves to be the leading lessons of the Mark Master degree.

The Mark Degree forms one of the closest links connecting the old operative Masonry with the present speculative system. In the old operative Guilds each newly admitted craftsman was required to select and record a mark amid impressive ceremonies.

Let us for a few moments rivet our thought on the main symbol of Mark Masonry and its allegorical significance. It is not the foundation in Masonry on which we are to contemplate, for that lies at our feet, and we would have to look down at it. Let us direct our eyes to the Key Stone. To do so we must look up and contemplate the whole plan and finished structure. There are three points regarding the Key Stone which we are appropriate to point out: First, the Material--Stone. The compact, durable substance prepared by the great wisdom of the Divine Creator--the result of centuries of preparation, the outcome of His wondrous plan in creation, the main solid foundation of the great world in which we live. In our Masonic infancy we were taught that the rough ashlar represents man in his untutored state, full of strength and possibility, but requiring the firm force of discipline and education to prepare him for his place in organized civilized society.

Then we come to the second point. The Key Stone is unique and the beautiful workmanship differs from what has been previously passed and approved. It is the most important stone in the Building. How dearly the genuine Mark Mason will recognize in this--the sublime truth: he is the most important part in the whole structure. There is one place that only he himself can fill. Were this truth firmly planted in our hearts, Freemasonry would grow in grandeur. We are the Key Stone itself, and if we fall short of the requirements, Freemasonry will also fall short.

Then comes the third and final thought. Mark Masonry is not the initial step in Freemasonry. The skilled Craftsman has already learned the main principles that rule and govern all workmanship for the holy building. No doubt he has already wrought many stones of fair and square proportions. Now he is taught that each workman has a chance to distinguish himself by the preparation of a superior piece of work which will strengthen, as well as adorn, the whole structure.

PAST MASTER DEGREE

It may aptly be called the degree of responsibility for in this degree the emphasis is placed on the importance of being faithful to our Masonic duties and obligations, a lesson which must be learned before we can enter the Royal Arch and receive the Master's Word.

The secrets imparted in this degree are called the "secrets of the chair," and these secrets, for the most part, constitute the Past Master Degree. In many Grand Lodges it is still required that a Master-elect, if he has not already done so, shall receive this degree before he can assume the chair as Master of his lodge. The possession of this degree was also a necessary prerequisite for receiving the Royal Arch Degree. The requirement of being a Past Master so limited the number of candidates for the Royal Arch Degree that Chapter Masonry lost much of its strength from the want of numbers duly interested and qualified to confer it.

Eventually the Royal Arch Chapters, sitting as lodges of Past Masters, conferred the degree. However, Past Masters so made did not acquire the honors of that grade in symbolic lodges. Thus arose the terms Actual Past Master (one who has actually been elected and installed to preside over a symbolic lodge) and Virtual Past Master (one who has received the degree in a chapter).

MOST EXCELLENT MASTER DEGREE

This degree was developed in America and wherever found abroad has indications that it was derived from our system. Its contents are taken directly from factual Masonic history and information contained in the Old Testament.

King Solomon's Temple, for more than a thousand years, stood upon the same site as the center, the living heart of the religious and national life of the Jews. From periods of desertion, desecration and ruin it was restored from time to time. It continued to serve its hallowed purposes as long as the national life of that people survived. And when at last, in the year of 70 A.D., at the terrible siege of Titus, a lighted torch hurled by a Roman besieger through the open window of one of its chambers set it on fire, and its massive timbers went up in flames, and its stately walls fell crashing to rise no more, it was the lamentable "sign and token" that the political existence of that devoted race was near an end.

The Temple was no more, but its spirit lived on. The sublime idea for which it stood, that of worship and service, survived and expanded into the religious consciousness of the Christian world. It was reproduced in their temples and their worship. Much of its terminology became the watchwords of those medieval guilds of cathedral builders (the operative Masons of those days).

While the Temple stood it was preeminently the place of worship and communion with God. Daily the morning and evening sacrifice was offered; daily the oblation of prayer and praise ascended; daily the fragrance of incense filled its hallowed courts. It was, moreover, the place chosen by Jehovah for the revelation of His oracles and the special manifestation of His glory. It was therefore a place unutterably holy and consecrate, the meeting place of the Divine and human, of God and man.

This degree reminds us of what is at once the highest, the noblest and the most blessed exercise of the powers and faculties of the human soul, namely, worship.

It tells us in ceremonies most solemn, most beautiful, most instructive and impressive the true purpose of man's life and therefore what that life should be.

It tells us that none but the meritorious and praiseworthy, none but those who through diligence and industry have advanced far toward perfection, none but those who have been seated in the Oriental Chair by the unanimous suffrages of their Brethren, can be admitted to this degree of Masonry.

In the original establishment, when the Temple of Jerusalem was finished, and the fraternity celebrated the cap-stone with great joy, it was demonstrable that none but those who had proved themselves to be complete masters of their profession were admitted to this honor, and indeed the duties incumbent on every Mason who is accepted and acknowledged as a Most Excellent Master, are such as render it indispensable that he should have a correct knowledge of all the preceding degrees.

All this and more is taught in the Most Excellent Master Degree.

ROYAL ARCH DEGREE

Like the term Archbishop, "Arch Mason" seems to have first applied to the Installed Masters, to distinguish them from the Master Masons when the "Master's Part" became a separate and recognized degree. From this circumstance grew the rule, which we still observe, that a candidate for the degrees must have "regularly passed the chair." Viewed in this light the name seems not only simple but very appropriate. This reaffirms the thought that the Royal Arch Degree is the summit of ancient Craft Masonry.

Some argue that the first three are the only degrees in Masonry. This, I believe, is equivalent to claiming that which was lost was no part of Masonry, and it is not necessary that it be known. Common sense teaches otherwise. This degree is no less than the perfection and consummation of the Third Degree.

If, at any time during the construction of the Temple, the place of the deceased Architect was effectively filled and work successfully finished, the instructions relative to the filling of that place are as much Masonry as the instructions relative to the causing of the vacancy by the death of the Architect; all must admit that it was his death that caused the loss, and through his death the Key Stone was left in the quarry.

If we trace its history back, we find its germ in the Third Degree, in the discovery of the Lost Word, originally imparted as the last and greatest secret of Symbolic Masonry. This, again became the germinal principle of a separate degree called Royal Arch. It sets up no artificial standard of right or wrong, but only that which is found in the Book of the Law. While it teaches us that life is earnest and real, it also teaches that the grave is not its goal but that those who humbly, prudently, faithfully, and sincerely live the life of service here below await unexpected discoveries, unsought honors at its close, even a name and a place in the City and Temple of God, that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

The first three degrees must undoubtedly awaken in the candidate a desire to know the significance and value of that which was lost. A substitute was adopted, but should this suffice? Unfortunately it does, with many; but the intelligent seeker after truth is not content to stop there, but soon learns that the work was not abandoned in consequence of the death of one of the masters. The Capitular Degrees open up a way by which he can obtain that which he seeks, and it is only natural, and proper, that he should take the next step.

**BY
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