

An Introduction to Royal Arch Masonry

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Introduction

The Capitular Degrees of the Chapter Of Royal Arch Masonry

Mark Master Mason Degree

Most Excellent Master Degree

The Supreme Degree of the Holy Royal Arch

Introduction

The purpose of this is to provide information which may be helpful, and to invite your interest in Royal Arch Masonry in the hope that you may desire to become a member of a Royal Arch Chapter. Capitular, or Royal Arch, Masonry provides the additional ceremonies which extend the Master Mason's Degree and, together with the three degrees of the "Symbolic" Lodge, constitute Ancient Craft Masonry.

Every Brother who has sought the Light of Freemasonry of his own free will and accord and has been raised to the Sublime Degree of a Master Mason, has been rewarded by receiving one of the highest honours to which he will attain in this life. He is a member of one of the oldest and most honourable of all fraternal fellowships. Clothed in his Master Mason's Apron he is welcomed in all regular Masonic Craft Lodges around the world. While others may wear decorations and jewels which indicate distinguished service which go with office or long years of membership, young and old are still most proud of their Mother Lodge, and their attainment to full standing as Master Masons among their brethren; none but Master Masons who have entered fully into that experience, with all its allegorical teachings can adequately appreciate the inner satisfaction which fills the mind and soul of the candidate thus re-united with the Companions of his former toil. Early in the history of English speaking Freemasonry the Grand Lodge of England "Ancients" and "Moderns" arranged that those who had reached the chair of the Master of a Lodge could be given further knowledge by receiving the Royal Arch Degree. In 1813 the "Ancients" and the "Moderns" merged to form the present United Grand Lodge of England, universally acknowledged as the Mother Grand Lodge of the world and traditionally the custodian of sound Ancient Craft Masonry. At that time (1813) they adopted 21 Articles of Union, being firm and solid landmarks to forever guard Freemasonry throughout the world. The second of these 21 Articles of Union reads as follows: "It is declared and pronounced that pure Ancient Masonry consists of three degrees, and no more; viz, those of the Entered Apprentice, the Fellowcraft and the Master Mason, including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch."

This landmark has never been changed by the United Grand Lodge of England thus showing the importance of the Royal Arch Degree in the Masonic System. Indeed it may well be said that the Supreme Degree of the Holy Royal Arch is for Ancient Craft Masonry, a source from which the Master Mason can seek to receive and to share the Master's word as

traditionally was done by the original three Grand Masters when their number was complete. Capitular, or Royal Arch, Masonry, in the Jurisdictions of the several Grand Chapters in Canada, (with one exception), consists of three degrees, the Mark Master Mason, the Most Excellent Master Mason and the Supreme Degree of the Holy Royal Arch.

To those who have an interest in Masonic philosophy or ritual, the Capitular Degrees will have a particular appeal. They contain no abstruse philosophy or unintelligible doctrines, but do contain simple, plain statements of Truth, easily understandable and helpful in our relations to life. The following brief outline of the scope and purpose of the progressive steps of Royal Arch Masonry is of necessity, only a fleeting glimpse of the panorama that has its beginning obscured by the mists of antiquity and its ending veiled in that far distant country from whose bourne no traveller ever returns.

#The Capitular Degrees of the Chapter Of Royal Arch Masonry

#Mark Master Mason Degree

The degree of Mark Master is the first of the Capitular degrees and is one of great importance. It is illustrative of the Fellowcraft degree and some writers assert that at one time it formed a part of that degree. It explains the manner in which the operative craftsmen engaged in the building of King Solomon's Temple were known and distinguished in receiving their wages.

The traditions of Freemasonry inform us that at the building of the Temple of Solomon, the order of Mark Masters was selected from the great body of Craftsmen, of which there were two divisions. The first, or higher class, worked in the quarries in "hewing, squaring and numbering" the stones, as explained in our lectures. Each craftsman identified the work he had completed by placing thereon his personal mark. Hence this class of Craftsmen were called Mark Masters and received their pay from the Senior Warden.

The second class, though predominating in numbers, were younger and more inexperienced men, with less skill and knowledge and hence were not entitled to, or in possession of, a Mark which distinguished a Mark Master. They were, therefore, given another token and received their wages in the middle of the chamber, in the form of corn, wine and oil, agreeable to the stipulation of King Solomon with Hiram, King of Tyre. In this degree important lessons are taught in regard to honesty of purpose and performance of actions, which lay the foundation stones for the character building developed in the degrees that follow.

#Most Excellent Master Degree

The ceremonies of this degree refer to the completion and dedication of the First Temple. Approximately seven and one-half years were consumed in its erection, and at the completion of this magnificent edifice, it is reasonable to suppose that King Solomon should bestow some special form of recognition upon the zealous and skilful builders for the perfection of their labors.

To this end, no greater evidence of approval and appreciation could have been devised than the honourable title of "Most Excellent Master", which was bestowed upon those who

have proved themselves to be proficient and outstanding masters of their profession.

It was, therefore, not conferred upon the whole body of workmen, but was limited to those who, through diligence and industry, had progressed far toward perfection, and by so doing had merited recognition for their efficient and praiseworthy efforts. The degree is based upon Biblical and historical facts and is presented in a manner designed to carry nearer to completion that character building, the foundations of which were laid in the preceding degrees.

#The Supreme Degree of the Holy Royal Arch

This beautiful degree was considered so important in our earlier history that none but actual Masters of Craft Lodges were permitted to take it. As time went on this pre-requisite came to be considered a hardship, as it prevented worthy men from participating in Royal Arch Masonry. This restriction is not at present effective in Canadian Jurisdictions. All Master Masons are now eligible for membership in a Royal Arch Chapter.

Chronologically, the setting for this degree is some 470 years from the completion of the First Temple, as depicted in the Most Excellent Master Degree. The First Temple had been destroyed and now preparations were under way for the building of the Second Temple.

In the preparatory work for the building of the Second Temple many valuable relics belonging to the craft were discovered, a knowledge of which was essential in providing explanatory answers to various items which up to this time had been hidden from the vision of the Master Mason.

The central idea of the entire system of Freemasonry being the LOSS and RECOVERY of the WORD, the WORD is the pivotal point about which the entire system of Masonic Symbolism revolves. "Its possession is the consummation of all Masonic knowledge." Wherever there is a "loss" there should be a "recovery".

The Royal Arch Degree is not a "Higher Degree", but a volume of the series in a sublime story revealed through symbolism. It should satisfy the anticipation of the Candidate that the earnest searcher after Truth is rewarded; that darkness gives place, not to a feeble ray of light, but to the full radiance which comes with the knowledge of the attributes and the eternal presence of God.

"To be a Master Mason is to have the highest and most honourable degree that any man can attain in Ancient Craft Masonry. It entitles him to all the rights and privileges of the Craft, for it should ever be remembered that all the accumulated so-called Higher Degrees do not add anything to his Masonic stature. Because the R.A. degree is definitely an extension of the Master Mason's degree there can be no impropriety in inviting a Master Mason to add to his Masonic knowledge by becoming a Royal Arch Mason. To gain this knowledge is a privilege open to every Master Mason, and in that light the opportunity may well be presented to him."