

A CHARGE TO KEEP

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In 1813, after many years of controversy between various schools of medieval masonry in England - each claiming certain basic fundamentals, sources, rituals and degrees as its own, the mother Grand Lodge of England and its rival, the "Antients", recognizing their mutual aims toward morality and brotherhood, settled their differences and united under one banner. At this merger, there were drawn up the articles of union which set forth once and for all the standards to be followed and degrees to be recognized. This historical declaration stated:

"Pure Ancient Masonry consists of but three degrees and no more, namely: that of Entered Apprentice, the Fellow Craft and the Master Mason, including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch."

These articles were the result of arduous and extensive study of the joint committee comprised of the best talent within both Grand Lodges - men who were familiar with the traditions and history of Freemasonry and who were meticulous and painstaking in the preparation of Freemasonry's most important document to be presented for the government of the craft throughout the entire world.

As of the date of this historic document and united action, there had already been in existence hundreds of other degrees and several complete rites practiced in the name of masonry. The Scottish Rite, which seems to have accumulated together more of these so-called degrees than any other had been newly formed at Charleston, S.C. over a decade ago. The General Grand Chapter, assuming importance as the mother of an American system known correctly as the York Rite, or Ancient York Masons, - for it was based upon York Legends, Traditions and History, - had been functioning for fifteen years. Consequently, when the mother Grand Lodge of England declared in those historic articles of union that the Royal Arch was a part of pure and Ancient Masonry, every lodge in the world, connected to the Grand Lodge of England, immediately predicated membership therein on the Royal Arch. And thus it remains to this day. The Grand Lodge of England has consistently refused to alter its position and every English mason seeking the Cryptic Rite, Templar Orders, Scottish Rite, Royal order of Scotland, Red Cross of Constantine, etc., must first complete his Ancient Craft Masonry and possess all the secrets including those contained only in the Holy Royal Arch. Certainly it was not by accident or without being fully cognizant of the many angles involved, that the articles of union were drawn up:

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Royal Arch Masons, as well as Master Masons should never lose sight of this most significant, historic and far reaching development in masonry. To substantiate this we must go back to about 1725 when, a ceremony, known as the Hiramic legend, was, for symbolic purposes, introduced, into the ritual of the master masons degree. It must have replaced something - perhaps only a word - we cannot say what. But we do know that early floor cloths, tracing boards, printed illustrations, etc, of the craft lodges showed a certain key word or character prior to that time, but which disappeared entirely from the craft, together with certain emblems, symbols, etc. formerly found on aprons, tracing boards and elsewhere. These symbols according to earliest Royal Arch records, were always associated with the Royal Arch Degree. This leads us to believe that the secrets of the Royal Arch were transferred from the craft degrees to the Royal Arch as a result of the changes in forms brought about by the introduction of the Hiramic legend.

The heart of the Royal Arch system is based upon a "word", and it could not be so if that word had remained in the ritual of the masters degree. Naturally all of the beautiful, wandering ritual of the Royal Arch was never a part of any craft degree. It could hardly be otherwise, - other theories to the contrary, notwithstanding.

No doubt, there was little or no ritual in the fraternity in the early beginnings. Hence original development of the ritual must have been very crude. Certainly, there were degrees as such, but which were merely probationary periods of learning the skills - perhaps with some simple ceremony - eventually developing into simple ritual at the entering of an apprentice or admitting as a fellow of the craft. The masters degree did not originate until about 1725 and at that time there also appeared special masters lodges, and the Hiramic legend.

The mother Grand Lodge was formed in 1717 by speculative masons of four old surviving operative lodges. These were highly desirable citizens who admired the high ideals and tenents of operative masons and were received into such lodges on somewhat of an honorary basis. The main object in view was a social organization of good fellows to perpetuate the old name of the honorable society of masons in a modern club. They were social groups enjoying life in the fullest and perhaps having some prankish fun at ceremony and initiation. They were liberal in their charitable endeavors, and for this reason, among others, became very popular, - especially when royalty was attracted and admitted as members.

When ritual was developed, and after the Hiramic legend was inserted into the developing degrees, a great deal of interest in the

ritual became evident. The effect of the interest and participation of such men as William Preston in England and Thomas Smith Webb in America was considerable. Lectures were developed as a means of masonic education, dramatics were introduced and a system of emblems and symbols used to impress the teachings upon the mind. In their day, these were considered quite enlightening. There are, however, freemasons in our day, who sincerely desire to see our degrees more streamlined, brought into focus with present day techniques, and the quaint old ceremonies retained only as a memento of early days. It is doubtful if there will be many fundamental changes, even though there might be explanatory instructions to the initiates about the symbolic oaths and liturgies. Perhaps this is needed.

Originally, the god of nature was the god of masonry - the monotheistic or one-god idea, to which anyone who believed in God could comfortably subscribe. But with the introduction of the Hiram legend symbolizing the resurrection of Christ, the monotheist could become uncomfortable when receiving the masters degree. The Royal Arch has remained true to the original idea of the one-god, more so than the lodge, and in so doing, has perhaps preserved the universality of masonry more faithfully than the lodge.

In Freemasonry, the ritualistic content of the fraternity is significantly insignificant as compared with its purpose of building a temple with life. Royal Arch Masonry presents, it seems, that true chamber of reflection for the seeker-after-truth. Far too many of those exalted to the Most Sublime Degree of Royal Arch Mason fail entirely to discern what it is that we strive for and accomplish.

The building, destruction and re-building of temples for worship of tribal gods is nothing new or unique, nor of particular interest to most people. This happens in many cultures - Egyptian, Babylonish and Oriental. The Jewish is only one of many cultures and not particularly superior to any. So it is certainly not the purpose of Royal Arch Masonry to endorse or symbolize the Jewish culture in its degrees except as an historical background or vehicle in presenting source material for symbolic treatment of a soul stirring result, - "Great is truth and mighty above all things."

So we seek truth, which in our case is a logo, or word, symbolizing God. According to the German philosopher Goethe, Faust wondered over the opening lines of John's Gospel, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God." "Something must have preceded the word", he mused. -- Then, with sudden insight, he cries, "in the beginning was the DEED." So it is the DEED, the daily living, that really counts with us - not the actual finding of a word as such. Truth makes us free and we are guided to right living as an example for others - or in rebuilding the temple of life. This is our challenge - our goal.

So the Royal Arch Mason in seeking the truth, is really seeking a method or goal through our liturgical processes. And this fact must not be overlooked: Truth and freedom are personal goals and must be achieved on the personal level. They cannot be given to the group. They must be EARNED by the individual. This is important.

Democracy is, or should be, a revolutionary movement to speed up the growth and progress of the individual and of the state. Royal Arch Masonry is, above all, a democratic way of life and organized along democratic lines, as opposed to the ideologies of hierarchies and dictatorships of the many reactionary "isms" prevalent today. Ours is a mode, rather than a code of life, with the right of individual freedom of belief and opinions. If Freemasonry and the rights of free men are to be perpetuated in this historic nuclear age, it must be through the medium of the democratic processes in life. Any other way means destruction.

What then does masonry propose to do in this crisis? We may continue our Archaic ritual, degrees and symbolism, but we must use them as vehicles for teaching and expressing our democratic philosophy of life. We must build up a system of democratic ideology that will so permeate our membership, that we can and will be recognized within and without our society, as the soul of democracy. We must educate Freemasons in the virtues, blessings and hopes of man in this truly masonic way of life, ultimately leading to establishment of a brotherhood of man on this earth, which shall insure lasting peace, and life more abundant, for the sons of man. It is a goal not unattainable in our time. Our directive is clear, challenging and timely. Ours is a charge to keep!

Perhaps we are to see a new day upon this earth, - who knows. We do know that the old order changeth. We are in the midst of action and can behold the beginnings of new concepts of life and behaviour. Those institutions that fail to move ahead with progress are to find themselves guarding empty sepulchres. This is no day to be content with mere holding actions and simply to maintain the status quo. The hour for advancement into the future has arrived. Masonry must be in the vanguard of this great surge of humanity: UPWARD AND ONWARD. We are an important part of this world and there must be no retreat from either reason or duty.

THE CHIPS ARE DOWN! THE CLARION CALL HAS SOUNDED! CHALLENGE! MARCH ON! EVER ON!