

The Royal Arch
-The Capstone
of
Symbolic Masonry



Prepared by
JAMES NOAH HILLMAN, P.G.H.P.
for the
GRAND CHAPTER
ROYAL ARCH MASONS IN VIRGINIA

RICHMOND
1949

COPYRIGHT 1949
BY THE GRAND CHAPTER ROYAL ARCH
MASONS OF VIRGINIA

Masonry A Unit

The Symbolic Degrees of the so-called Blue Lodge, that is, the Entered Apprentice, the Fellowcraft, and the Master Mason, constitute the body of Masonry. However, the whole of Masonry, including all branches, is a unit. Furthermore, the body is in need of the branches, for its own symmetry and beauty, and certainly the branches cannot even live without the body. Each has need of the other.

The Royal Arch An Important Branch

Among the many branches of the main Masonic body, none is more meaningful than the Royal Arch. Like the three symbolic degrees, it is the beneficiary of a symbolism and a Masonic heritage for which no Companion need ever to apologize. It represents an unfolding vista of those moral heights which men have attained through unswerving fidelity, unselfish service, and sacrificial abandonment to

a great cause. It brings into view the ever-widening horizons of revealed Truth. It provides a fuller interpretation for some of those sublime lessons which are not completely explained in the Symbolic Lodge. It supplies a somewhat more satisfying answer to some of the questions which intellectual curiosity finds incomplete, both in the explanation, and the Symbolic teachings of the Master's Degree.

The Royal Arch A Complementary Degree

The Royal Arch is that degree which provides the Master Mason with a complement which is most valuable in satisfying both the neophyte, and the accomplished student of Masonic culture. Without the Royal Arch Degree, the Master's Degree, — beautiful in grandeur and sublime in content as it is, — remains somewhat like an imposing building with a missing capstone. The architecture, the symmetry, and the whole superstructure may be exceedingly pleasing, but the finishing

touch is wanting. One might say that it is like a lovely poem with important verses omitted; or an interesting novel with the conclusion missing; or the story of the loss of a valuable jewel with no statement as to its recovery; or a promise only partially fulfilled. The Royal Arch Degree, to some extent, supplies the implied, yet partially hidden meanings of the Master's Degree.

The Royal Arch Not Something New

Ancient Craft Masonry included the Holy Royal Arch Degree. Here is what Anderson's Constitution has to say about it:

“Pure Ancient Masonry consists of three degrees, no more; viz., those of the Entered Apprentice, the Fellow Craft, and the Master Mason, **including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch.**”

It was conferred, originally, as a part of the Master's Degree, and was connected with so-called Blue Lodges. It may have been conferred by a different set of officers than those of the

Symbolic Lodge, but it was certainly considered a part, in fact, a finishing part, of Symbolic Masonry.

The Royal Arch Not A Higher Degree

There is nothing higher in Masonry than the Symbolic Degrees. The Royal Arch is an additional or complimentary degree. It is intended to provide additional Masonic light. It is difficult to believe that one can become proficient in Ancient Craft Masonry, if he has never received the Royal Arch Degree. What is more, it is exceedingly helpful in a fuller understanding of Master's Degree which it exemplifies to some extent. By all means, every really interested Masonic student should acquire the Royal Arch Degree. His Masonic life will be enriched; his appreciation of the beauties of Masonic philosophy will be greatly enhanced, and his interest will be made abiding.

The Royal Arch An Additional Fellowship

The Fellowship of Masonry is one of its most valuable assets. The Royal

Arch provides an additional comradeship. Naturally, the ties in the Royal Arch Chapter can be a bit closer, perhaps, than in the Blue Lodge, because, as a rule, the Chapter is a smaller group. Furthermore, there are more official stations in the Chapter, which, with a smaller membership, means that more members have a common responsibility. A common task or obligation tends to tie brethren together with a little closer companionship.

The Royal Arch Ritual

One who enjoys ritualistic work will find ample opportunity in the Royal Arch Chapter for the full use of his talents. The work is beautiful, meaningful, and even sublime. Since there are more stationed officers in the Chapter than in the Blue Lodge, a larger percentage of the membership can participate, officially. Also, more opportunity is afforded to learn, teach, and deliver the many important and beautiful lectures of the Chapter ritual.

Virginia Royal Arch A Sovereign Body

The Virginia system, which is the result of the consolidation in 1841, of the Grand Council of Virginia with the Grand Chapter of Virginia, is somewhat unique. The Cryptic Degrees, namely, the Degrees of Select and Royal Master, are conferred in the Chapter, and made prerequisite to the Royal Arch. Hence, instead of four (4) degrees, as is the case with almost all the Chapters of the United States, Virginia has six (6), including the Select and Royal Master. These degrees are:

1. Mark Master
2. Past Master
3. Select Master
4. Royal Master
5. Most Excellent Master
6. Royal Arch Mason

Some Hints On the Meaning of Royal Arch Degrees

1. MARK MASTER—This degree is an extended teaching of the Fellowcraft Degree, wherein is

taught order, regularity, and discipline. "The work of our hands and the thoughts of our hearts should be good and true—such as the Great Overseer will see fit to approve."

2. PAST MASTER—This is an honorary degree. All Wardens are required to have this degree. It has to do with presiding over a Lodge. It is in the Chapter, because at the time the Royal Arch was a part of the Lodge degrees, only those who had presided over the Lodge were eligible to receive the Royal Arch Degree.
3. SELECT MASTER—The history of this degree is connected with the commemoration of the deposit of an important treasure, said to have been planned by Hiram Abif, and has to do with a secret vault beneath the Temple.
4. ROYAL MASTER—The legend of this degree occurred at the

building of the first Temple, and after the death of the "Builder."

5. **MOST EXCELLENT MASTER**—This is purely an American degree. It is practiced in no other country. It has to do with the dedication of King Solomon's Temple.
6. **ROYAL ARCH**—This degree, originally a part of the work of a Lodge, is built on the theory that an ancient word which was lost, was found in the Royal Arch, and under most exalted and dignified surroundings.

These are some hints which we believe will appeal to an interested Master Mason.

Royal Arch Masons Welcome Inquiry

If a brother Master Mason is interested in "further light," and what Mason is not,—he can without the slightest hesitation, express his desire to any Companion of the Royal Arch Chapter. A petition blank can be had for the asking. Any Companion may

even urgently solicit his Masonic brethren of the Blue Lodge to join the Chapter, without violating, in the least, any Masonic traditions or landmarks. This writer sincerely believes that no Master Mason makes any mistake when he joins a Royal Arch Chapter. Furthermore, he will be a better informed Master Mason after he has received the Royal Arch Degree.

Becoming A Royal Arch Mason

Any Master Mason who is in good standing in his Blue Lodge may petition a Royal Arch Chapter, in the jurisdiction of which he resides, for the degrees as conferred in the Chapter. The petition is very similar to that of the Blue Lodge. It will need to be endorsed or "vouched for" by two Chapter Masons of the Chapter to which petition is made. The fee for the degrees is usually very modest, and there is but one vote on the petition. That is to say, that one is elected for all six degrees at one and the same time, and is not required to have a ballot on each advancement, as

in the Blue Lodge. Also, it is not required that a catechism be learned for advancement, though it is desirable that one familiarize himself with the several signs, grips and passwords of the various degrees.

The Royal Arch Supports the Symbolic Lodge

With good grace, with becoming propriety, and without apology, the Royal Craft joins heart and tongue with the Symbolic Lodge in promoting the prosperity and happiness of the intellectually hungry, the humble seekers after truth, and the literary savants of all branches of Masonry,—believing, as it does, that Masonry is a unit, and that all members thereof, of whatever affiliation or group, are a part of that living, throbbing, pulsating force which continuously strives to glorify God and serve mankind.