

A PRINCE  
OF  
DOORKEEPERS

by

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What really amounts to the founding of Craft Masonry in England, was the formation of a "Grand Lodge" in 1717; it was not an exciting affair; nor the early years of its life especially distinguished.

The simple moralising of the medieval Operatives which it inherited, sufficed for only so long as those in charge if it were of the same generation as the founders. Once the Craft had become adopted by men distinguished by birth, education and social standing — as we now know it was so adopted — a broadening of the main concept was bound to occur. The expansion of the ceremonial into the now well established progressive "Degrees" was a gradual accomplishment which in its turn led inevitably to a special "Chair" Degree for the Mastership.

Although all this represented a spectacular advance on pre 1717 — or what was known as pre 1717 Masonry — it did not long suffice. The "developers" had achieved considerable success, and whether or not they were merely inspired by it, or the success they *had* achieved, in itself pointed to a yet more esoteric prominence as clearly the natural inheritance of a Craft in the making, we shall never now know.

Nor does it matter. Suffice to say, the gradual outline into which the Craft ritual had now become groomed and moulded, not only left the way wide open for a continuance of that peculiar and esoteric philosophy it enshrined, but actually demanded it, thus leaving the emergence of what we now know as the HRA a mere formality.

Considering the kinship which the sponsors had, all along, sought to establish with the M/M progression, it was only to be expected the newer Order should seek to implement similar requirements for its Principals, and by insisting a Comp; could become eligible for the R A Chairs, only by first serving as a Scribe, we perceive an analogy with the Wardens of the Craft.

That only a P M of the Craft could be installed as a Principal is fair enough, but there seems little to justify the further ritual requirement, that he must also first serve as a Scribe — beyond the analogy just mentioned.

Important in history as E and H undoubtedly are, after many years intimate association with every aspect of R/A M/sy, I doubt if many Chapter members really appreciate just how prominently these two Scribes figure in Jewish Chronicles, and consequently, with what complete justification the Ritual accords them their prominence in the Officers rankings.

Perhaps I can enlighten them.

The Babylonian captivity dragged on. Year succeeded year, each passage of time finding the captive race more and more integrated with the captors, until, so it would appear, little remained to prevent those who ardently wished to return "home", readily obtaining permission to do so.

Zerubbabel — after his notable *Coup D'etat* had departed, jealously clutching the precious document empowering him to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem which the King had granted him, together with the royal guarantee of protection and assistance.\*

Once news became prevalent that work had already started, a wave of enthusiasm provoked a considerable exodus. Prominent amongst the Leaders were Esra and Nehemiah — both having foregone high positions at the Court of Cyrus. Both were able men; Esra learned in Law and Economics, Nehemiah given more to practical application of the Sciences.

Alas! they found little to enthuse over on their arrival at Jerusalem. The city was a rubble; the populace a rabble.

In many ways the R A Ritual is unique. Besides being neat and workmanlike it has the great merit of being concise. This is quite notable throughout but nowhere more so than in the Lectures. Here the Author(s) handle great moments in Jewish History with brevity, tact, precision and accuracy, the events at all times being welded into the narrative with true journalistic skill.

For a considerable period of my membership as a R.A.M. I quite failed to recognise why Nehemiah — a considerable figure in his own right — had been given a post which at first sight appeared to be no more than that of a mere doorkeeper and reckoned it an injustice. I should have known better than to doubt the competence of the Author(s), and better advised still, to study — as I am sure they did — the Old Testament Books of Esra and Nehemiah. †

There one may read at length, the exploits of these two worthies: Here is related in great detail how 'N' finding the city and its protective walls in complete ruin, gathered around him bands of willing workers and set about restoring the defences. There was no shortage of labour; no deficiency of strong hands and willing hearts, and in no time at all the walls were rebuilt and all six Gates repaired or renewed, and if the time given for all this, viz, sixty nine days, is correct, then it must have been a tremendous effort, and Nehemiah a prince of "doorkeepers" indeed.

\*See my earlier publication, "What's in a Name".

†Nehemiah, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4 and 8.