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M.E. Grand Superintendent, Ex. Comps, Comps and founders of the Vernon Chapter, my terms of reference are wide indeed and short the time allotted for my words. So you will, I am sure, forgive me for any ideas which seem to you an oversimplification, undeveloped, inevitably superficial and possibly incorrect.

I would compress what I have to say within three headings:-

1) History.

Assuming that the ignorance of some of you is nearly as great as my own used to be, I feel sure that a very brief outline of the history of R.A. Masonry will be instructive and helpful. Its working started in the first half of the 18th Century, the first printed mention being in a Dublin newspaper of 1742. One must remember that the Craft originally had only two Degrees and the 3rd Degree started in the late 1720's becoming thoroughly established by 1750. Alongside this development was that of the R.A. which was a basic feature of the Antients' divergence from the Moderns. The Antients, whose Grand Lodge was unofficially formed in 1739 and officially in 1751, had besides this introduced the special extended working for the installation of the W.M. which is today receiving increasing recognition. We are therefore greatly indebted to them today. They conferred the R.A. Degree in their Lodges. The Moderns, ostrich-like, pretended for a long time that there was no such thing as the R.A., although many of their members had received the Degree. Oddly enough their first Grand Chapter or Charter of Compact, as it was called, was officially formed in 1766 before that of the Antients who followed suit in 1771.

The quarrel between these two Grand Lodges, after about 60 years of squabbling, was finally healed by their union in 1813 while the two Grand Chapters united in 1817 and thereafter Chapters were allotted to their appropriate Lodges.

A few other historical details are of interest:-

- a) Originally only Installed Masters were eligible for the R.A. and that gave rise to a great deal of subterfuge. After 1822 the M.M. qualification was introduced - as it is this day.

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- b) Up to 1902 only Principals and Past Principals took part in the opening of the Chapter.
- c) The ritual was revised in 1835. Up to that date the lectures in the Exaltation Ceremony were unknown and there was far more catechising of the candidate as in Craft working. It was then too that the first words of Genesis were substituted on the Scroll for the first words of St. John's Gospel.
- d) The four banners were adopted by the Antients from a coat of arms associated with a model of the temple exhibited in 1675.
- e) The first Chapter in Worcestershire was formed in Dudley in 1844.

2) Significance of the Ceremony.

What were our Predecessors trying to do?

I think there can be no doubt that in those days, as today, the majority of Freemasons must have felt that the 3rd Degree was incomplete. The light of a M.M. is but darkness visible nor is it hinted anywhere that the body of O.M.H.A. was raised to life - merely that his body was lifted from one Grave to be buried in another. We can be grateful that our Brn. in the early 18th Century felt as they did and in the R.A. - the completion indeed, but of course important enough to constitute a separate Degree from that of M.M. - they did their best quite simply to give the Can. with all reverence and humility the Vision of God. If we may regard the first three Degrees as representing Birth, Life and Death, then the R.A. represents the ascension of the Spirit, a process of Gradual Education and understanding of the Divine.

You will be aware that in choosing the setting for their ideas they made little attempt at historical coherence! Zerubabel came to Jerusalem nearly 60 years before Ezra and Nehemiah came 14 years later still. The legend of the vault is not in the bible at all but is lifted almost word for word from a translation of an ecclesiastical history, written by one Philostorgius who was born in 364 A.D. and it alludes to the reign of Julian the Apostate who tried to turn the Roman Empire back to paganism from Christianity.

But it was not the accuracy of history that mattered for their purpose, which was to convey definite ideas. Every Freemason has the right to find in the interpretation of our ceremonies those ideals and comfort which suit his own outlook and temperament.

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May I suggest to you a few random thoughts which, in a Degree that is often considered difficult, I myself have found helpful:-

- a) The password. Our candidate has suffered a figurative death: by raising in the 3rd Degree he has learned to hope and he comes full of humility and is encouraged by the promise of God's mercy.
- b) He is in darkness and clearly in the first part of exaltation is undergoing a period of trial and preparation. Then he is restored to light facing the Three Principals and the triangle and given the first words of Genesis (originally St. John) to read. If he were then capable of thought and understanding he would be in no doubt of what was intended. I suggest to you that that moment of revelation is one of the most dramatic in all our Ceremonies for it is no less than the Vision of God.

But that is not the completion. He has to retire - the altar is still unveiled. Then the three M.M.'s from Bab. are given a humble task to perform. Though only performing the humblest duties they are rewarded by the ineffable name of God himself, another lesson in the reward that awaits true humility and the desire to serve without thought of self.

- c) The revelation of the plate of Gold reveals three simple symbols - the triangle - the symbol of life - set within the circle, the emblem of eternity and outside and embracing them both - the square, the symbol of God's moral law. Simple indeed yet very profound.
- d) Lastly, throughout the Ceremony we are surely left in no doubt that the nature of God, as typified by the three Principals, is Trinitarian even as Man, represented by the three Sojourners, is made up of three parts, body, mind and spirit - an idea also displayed by the three greater and the three lesser lights.

- 3) My third and last thought must, of course, be for the Founders of this Vernon Chapter for whom this meeting is solemn, significant and memorable.

What are you doing today?

You are starting something whose importance you cannot fully realize and whose results you cannot possibly foresee.

May I here remind you of the story of the three Masons who were employed in building a Cathedral. Someone asked each of them what he was doing.

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The first replied "I'm earning so many pounds a week: It's a good job". The second said "I'm trying to bring rude matter into due form". The third - "I'm helping to build a noble Cathedral to the Greater Glory of God.

The parallel may not be exact, but you too, Companions, might have one of three motives. First to widen the scope for your own promotion - secondly to give the M.M.'s of this town and district the chance to be exalted in a Chapter which will belong to them more intimately since hitherto they have had to take this Degree elsewhere than in their own town.

But there is more to it than that.

Companions, there is no need for me to urge you to take the very highest view of your function today. It is at once a privilege, a challenge and a high responsibility - no less than to give a succession of M.M.'s the chance to continue their masonic education and through your work and by your good example to gain a truer vision of God and the meaning of our life on earth, where man is placed on probation in this world of time and space, but is no less surely destined for eternity.

And you today in this new Chapter, surrounded by so many friends who wish you well, have the exciting privilege of creating by your enthusiasm a noble tradition, or maintaining it by your perseverance and discipline so that generations, yet unborn, may in the days to come rise up and bless your names.

May I quote to you some lines written for the inauguration of a University:-

"This then is yours: to build exultingly
 High and yet more high,
 The knowledgeable towers above base wars,
 The sinful surges reaching up to lay
 Dishonouring hands upon your work, and drag
 From their uprightness your desires to lag
 Among low places, with a common gait,
 That so Man's mind, not conquered by his clay,
 May sit above his fate,
 Inhabiting the purpose of the stars,
 And trade with his eternity.

Yes, Companions, that shall be your aim and I can think of no loftier mission for though you may feel your contribution is small yet it is a positive contribution in a material age towards the solution of that perennial problem - how to save mankind from itself - and you may rightly feel you are indeed helping towards the final triumph for which we long but which, alas, seems so very far off - that day when all mankind shall give Glory to God in the Highest and Peace shall reign among men of good will.