

2007/10

SOME HISTORY AND PRINCIPLES OF THE DEGREE OF
ROSE CROIX OF HEREDOM

by

Ill. Bro. D.V. Wood, 32^d

Copyright Worcestershire Masonic
Library and Museum Trust

SOME HISTORY AND PRINCIPLES OF THE DEGREE OF
ROSE CROIX OF HEREDOM

The symbolism and meaning of our Ritual are matters which each individual must seek out for himself: as no two human beings are exactly alike so no two will react in exactly the same way to the Mysteries. Everyone is entitled to his own interpretation provided that it is his own and sincere... also provided that he does not try to ram his own views down the throat of others but, on the other hand, respects their opinions.

The Masonic Orders are all on a very high level of "Initiation", and they are "Universal" because they enshrine a meaning for "Everyman" if he has both the wish and patience to seek it out.

To illustrate this point.. open your Ritual anywhere and, in respect of the first thing which catches the eye, ask "why do I do that.. why then.. what do I mean when I do it?"

There is a very distinctive difference in the structure of the Rose Croix Ritual from that of most other Degrees for the candidate is a humble follower in the footsteps of our Redeemer.. he is NOT the central figure of the particular "Mystery".

In spite of numerous claims to a succession from the old Chivalric Orders, there is no satisfactory evidence at all of any of the High Masonic Grades before 1740.

So long as Masonry was Christian in character there was no need for anything beyond the Craft or the Royal Arch. But in 1723 Anderson formed his Constitutions which widened the field to men of any and all religious denominations and this caused great concern to Protestants and Roman Catholics alike. Then came the Papal Bull of 1758, "IN EMINENTI" and which placed a ban on Masons and even excommunicated those who sympathised with them.

At once semi-Masonic Orders sprang up like mushrooms. Near enough to satisfy those who wished to retain the Christian qualification yet far enough from "Masonry" to by-pass the Bull. This is the first real evidence of the so called "Higher Degrees" in Freemasonry.

The East has always been the place of light from which comes all knowledge and we who seek to lead men to a discovery (really the rediscovery) of the Word are knights of the East and West and our symbol is the Star which long ago led wise men from the East to the feet of the newly born King.

Almost everywhere outside this country the Order is known by the name "The Ancient and Accepted Rite". Sometimes it is called the A. and A. Scottish Rite... but NOT in this country.

When we speak of the "Rose Croix" we mean and so should convey that it is a degree of the Ancient and Accepted Rite.

In 1754 a Chapter was established in Western France and it consisted of 25 Degrees.. properly called "The Higher Degrees". Still later (in 1758) there was a body working in Paris (known as "The Emperors of the East and West"). It has been written by certain Masonic students that the year 1758 also saw the Order established in Germany by the Grand Lodge of the Three Globes. But it is to be particularly noted that there is extremely little historical foundation for this German connection. About this time dissension occurred in France which actually does account for the organisation working as the "Emperors of the East and West" and practising what they called the Rite of Perfection.

In 1761 authority was given to one Stephen Morin to take the Rite to America. His original patent cannot be found but there are copies of it still extant. He established the Rite with a full complement of Officers.

And it is interesting to here observe that it has been said that Morin and his associates were Jews. It must now be pointed out that there were two distinct versions of the Rose Croix Degree... the Christian and the Non-Christian! But by 1783 (refer Franken Manuscript) it was essentially Christian.

You are well aware that we confer the Intermediate Degrees (4th-17th) by name and with a very brief ceremony. But both in this country as well as in the U.S.A. all these Degrees are presented in the form of a play by a well practised "team". I am not aware of the frequency of performance in U.S.A. but here we are extremely fortunate in having the King Edward VII Chapter of Improvement who demonstrate the various Degrees each year, generally at the end of April or first few days in May. First in London and then, by permission of the Supreme Council 33°, somewhere in the Provinces. Each year one or two Degrees are demonstrated. I myself have seen these demonstrations on various occasions at such places as Nottingham, Manchester, Middlesbrough.. thus showing how different areas are chosen each year so that a numerous body of Rose Croix Masons may have the opportunity to attend. The difference between U.S.A. and this country appears to be in that while they present in similar fashion to The King Edward VII Chapter of Improvement, yet they confer the Degree briefly on a large number of onlookers at one time! And also in the U.S.A. a Brother often takes right up to and including the 32° at a 4 day conference whereas here only the Supreme Council confers the 30th and higher degrees and these are certainly not distributed at random or with frequency. They are to be valued when conferred, and so they should be!

It has been said that from Charleston in U.S.A. most other Supreme Councils derive their authority. This is due to the fact that the first Supreme Council was formed there in 1801 and that for long before that 25 Degrees had been "worked" until in the same year 8 Degrees were added thus bringing the total to 33. But there is no real data available as to from where these additional Degrees emanated. In U.S.A. claim is made that Frederick the Great was the first "great patron" but do bear in mind that they could not possibly go so far as to lay claim to Solomon or any other of the classical prototypes in that relatively young country. Certain it is that the Supreme Councils of Scotland and Ireland were chartered from France. And so we have the formation of Supreme Councils in many countries and it may be appreciated that much diplomacy was required in forming completely happy relationships with other ruling bodies. Such as, for instance, the three Craft Degrees which are also acknowledged as the first three Degrees of this Rite. These are left to the United Grand Lodge of England... speaking of this country, of course.

In England the first Supreme Council was formed in 1819 but it never met. This, coupled with the fact that the then Grand Master, the Duke of Sussex, did not encourage additional Degrees beyond the Craft.. even although he became a member of the Rose Croix.. meant that nothing was done until after the death of the Duke in 1843.

A Dr. Leeson took the first steps by applying to the Grand Orient of France. But in the meantime that well known Mason, Dr. Crucifix, obtained a Warrant from the Supreme Council in New York. Trouble was experienced when Crucifix and his associates were excluded for associating with the Grand Orient of France and so the Order only started to take positive steps forward after his death in 1850. Previously to all this it should be noted that Knight Templar Preceptories had adopted Rose Croix but further remarks are made a little later on in the paper.

We do know that the Rose Croix was conferred at Bath as far back as 1793 and that the members there accepted a new Warrant in 1866. In the Province of Bristol works the Baldwyn Chapter and it claims its date as "time immemorial". They even suggest that it was through one of their members going to live in London that our Supreme Council was formed and that he had "no authority" to give away their workings. For years they would not acknowledge the rulings and orders of Supreme Council. On such as this is

To join the Rose Croix requires that a man must have been a Mason for NOT less than three years. The real qualification, of course, is that he professes the Christian Faith. He must have only the finest types of Professing Christian. The Ceremony we perform is, as you also well know, called "Perfection", and it is the 18th Degree.

As, maybe of a little further interest, may I add a few comments relating to that earlier reference to Knights Templar.

For long I was puzzled when I came across such words as.. Bivouac.. Encampment.. camps, when I came across them on summonses which occasionally came into my hands. I asked Supreme Council about all this and they very kindly sent me a page of notes of great detail and much interest in a general way. It appears that the Antients had already added the Templar Degrees to their Craft and Royal Arch and they also added the Rose Croix Degree. It was inserted between the Knight group and the Kadosh and this was the system adopted by Dunkerly in his Grand Encampment of 1791.

This arrangement continued until the formation of our today's Supreme Council in 1845 and when, as Rose Croix was the 18th Degree of the Ancient and Accepted Rite, the Templar body agreed to discontinue working it, but as is usual some private Encampments ignored what then became a prohibition and went on working the old system until, in some cases, well into the 1860s.

A brief summary of the Intermediate Degree is worth while and is as follows...

as an E.A. you were to polish up the rough ashlar.

as a P.C. you were to learn to control emotions as you obtained power of the mind.

as a M.M. you were expected to gain complete mastery of the mind so that you could develop the intuition necessary for the work of and as a Past Master. The Degrees 4 to 12 are in abeyance in our ordinary Chapters, but in the 13th.. that of the Royal Arch you recover the word of a M.M. so long lost... for the TRUE WORD is THE WORD OF GOD.

Again the 14th to the 17th are not "worked" though we do some part of the 17th using it as preparation for the 18th degree and we entrust the candidate with certain signs and secrets.

The Supreme Degree known as the Rose Croix of Heredom may be regarded as possessing a threefold importance as it embodies the highest principles of PHILOSOPHY.. MORALITY.. and PIETY.

In reference to its origin Masonic writers have made many and conflicting statements. But at least they all agree that if it is NOT the earliest then it is contemporary with the earliest of what are termed the HIGHER DEGREE.

There was a Baron Westrode who, in 1784, wrote that he thought the Order had been founded by the Knights Templar in Palestine in 1188. He even adds that Prince Edward, eldest son of Henry III, whilst at the Crusades was admitted to the Order by Raymond Lulle, a devout man who spent much of his life making pilgrimages or missionary expeditions to Mohammedan countries.

The WORD HEREDOM. Today no satisfactory explanation has obtained. One (Ragon) says it is a word invented by the Stuart party and is a corruption of the Latin "Hereditum" meaning "hereditary estate". Mackay tells us, in his Lexicon, that he found the word HEREDON given in an old manuscript of the Scottish Rites and he suggests the present name is the French method of spelling the word.

This Degree may definitely be defined as FREEMASONRY Christianized.

THE GRAND PILLARS of the Craft, wisdom.. strength.. beauty are in this Degree, replaced by the Christian Pillars of Faith, Hope and Charity.

THE THREE LESSER LIGHTS of Craft become "33" and represent our Lord's sojourn on this earth.

THE JEWEL OF THE ORDER.. a pair of compasses with a rose on either side etc. is fully explained by the Ritual. Note that on the reverse side we have a white eagle with wings extended as if rising in the air. This sign of the eagle is of very great antiquity.. in Egypt the bird was sacred to the sun. To the Romans it was an emblem of Jupiter. In the book of Exodus we have Jehovah himself recorded as saying "Ye have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bear you on Eagles Wings and brought you unto myself". Hence in our Rose Croix Degree it is selected as a symbol of Christ bearing up, in his Divine character, the children of his adoption and assisting them from the dull corruption of this earth of a higher and holier sphere.

THE ROSE. The emblem of secrecy and silence and for this very reason it was sculptured on the ceilings of banqueting rooms to remind guests that what was spoken as the wine was passed round was NOT to be repeated outside. At Haddon Hall (Derbyshire) the ceiling is so decorated. In the year 1526 a carving of the Rose was placed in Confessionals. And so to the most familiar expression "sub-rosa"... it adds some interest. In the Song of Solomon HE is spoken of as the "Rose of Sharon". In various passages of scripture it is used as a figurative appellation of CHRIST.

THE CROSS. This, of course, is an ancient symbol and in use by the Egyptians long before the days of Moses. Since the Crucifixion it has been adopted as the emblem of HIM who suffered on the Cross.

RAPHAEL. He is described in the apocryphal book of Tobit as one of the seven Holy Angels who present the prayers of the Saints. Some old writers inferred from the story of Tobit that Raphael was the angel who was specially charged to watch over the sick and to guide and protect travellers. In this latter capacity he is depicted in the Rose Croix Degree.

THE CUBIC STONE, also represents our blessed LORD. In the gospel of St. John we read that when Christ was crucified one of the soldiers pierced our Master's side and forthwith came there out blood and water which itself will remind us of an earlier part of the ceremony.

One Must visualize the Ancient and Accepted Rite as a whole and as a collection of Degrees rather than as a Rite which is coherent and progressive up the scale of Initiation.. it is not generally appreciated that all the Initiatory systems conform to a single pattern ranging from the ancient classical mysteries.. the Coronation of Kings, the Rites of Egypt or Tibet, etc. etc. It is only the embellishment of them which differs according to time and place. Freemasonry belongs to the school of expression of man's belief in a Supreme Ruler and his hope of Immortality.

To follow this one must have some idea of the Initiatory Canon. The most important features of this are.. Preparation.. Purification.. Death .. Resurrection .. the New Name .. the Feast. Should the Rite be a complete one then other essentials will be found.

Thus a series of Knight (militant) Degrees will be followed by one of Professed Knight (or Priest) to be succeeded by one of Prince etc. and each group is like a flight of stairs separated by a landing from the next flight.. with each landing representative of a Ritual Death and Resurrection.

One of the best examples of this is in the Degree of Rose Croix for here the candidate comes as a Knight of the East and West and is raised to the highest degree of this series as Knight of the Pelican and Eagle before which he has suffered the Ritual Death, through which he passes unscathed to enter the lowest grade of Prince series and be raised as a Prince Rose Croix.

The whole and certainly the main object of our Rose Croix Degree is to free the mind from difficulties which retard progress to Perfection and to elevate it to the contemplation of Truth in all sincerity and absolute purity.