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### THE ROYAL ARCH LEGEND.

In reading this Paper may I say at once that the whole of the facts which I quote are taken from various published works on Freemasonry and that opinions which I may express are either the opinions expressed in those various works or my own conclusions drawn from them.

In considering the Legend of the Royal Arch as set out in our Ritual one must come to the conclusion that it is a Degree or Order which is concerned with things Spiritual but it has been said that it has no place in any of the various religious systems of mankind as such, since its inspirations are drawn from many systems and many sources taking from each that which was considered to be the best and discarding all other matter so that that which has been taken to make up the whole has now become a collection of significant symbols.

In this connection it must be remembered that there was a strong and indeed almost complete Christian influence over early speculative Masonry in this country and that it was not until the Constitutions of 1723 that for the first time a candidate for Freemasonry was required to be a person who had a belief in a Superior Being the Architect of Heaven and Earth, no matter what his religion or manner of Worship might be, whereas previous to that date a candidate for Freemasonry in this country had apparently been required to be Christian.

There can be very little doubt that the Royal Arch was introduced into this country at about the time of this significant change in the qualification of candidates, and in the early days it appears to be quite definite that the Royal Arch was worked as a Christian Degree. It is very strongly suggested that the very fact that such a change had been made led many of those in authority in the various Lodges to welcome and to help to spread a Christian Degree in order to offset what they regarded as a step away from Christianity which had been taken by the Fraternity in those Constitutions of 1723.

As has been said there can be very little doubt that in the middle 1700's the Royal Arch was introduced into England and all the evidence supports a suggestion that at about the same time it was also introduced into Scotland and Ireland. Most of the authorities appear to agree that it was introduced from the Continent of Europe where it is suggested it owed its origin to some clever framer of degrees by whom it was evolved to harmonize with the Third Degree in Craft masonry. I have been unable to trace any Writer who can speak of an earlier record of the Royal Arch than about 1730. In those very early days there was so far as can be ascertained very little of our present ceremony in the Royal Arch working, which was carried out in the Craft Lodge and was quite clearly regarded as a fourth degree.

It is interesting to consider how the Royal Arch working or Degree ever came to be accepted and one writer puts forward the theory that in the earliest days the Royal Arch was introduced from the Continent into what can only be called non-regular lodges or in other words

lodges which did not admit any allegiance to any Grand Lodge or other governing body. It is thought that such non-regular lodges thrived on having "something different" which the other or regular lodges had not and that when visitors from regular lodges found that a ceremony or degree was being worked in the non-regular lodges from which they were excluded they prevailed upon their own lodges to work the new degree. This may well have been the manner in which the working spread and it does seem to be generally accepted that the Degree or working was put forward as a then recently discovered part of ancient freemasonry which was the completion of the third degree a claim which we still make in our own ceremony when the candidate is told "You may perhaps imagine that you have this evening received a fourth degree in Freemasonry. This is not so, it is the Master Mason's Degree completed."

That the new or additional Degree was one which had an immediate appeal cannot be doubted and in a comparatively short period - probably no more than thirty years - the degree made its appearance in various places scattered all over the British Isles and there are numerous references in old minutes and other papers belonging to very old Craft lodges which shew that members were "admitted" or "passed" or "raised" as it was variously called to the new Degree. It has been said perhaps rather cynically that in the early days the Degree was frowned upon by those in authority in the various Grand Lodges and that the spread of the Degree was either as has already been said in non-regular lodges or in those Lodges which were either strong enough to ignore Grand Lodge or so weak that Grand Lodge ignored them. This position had however changed by 1767 when the powers that be in the person of Lord Blayney the Grand Master took the additional degree and immediately he had himself been admitted to the Royal Arch constituted the "Grand and Royal Chapter of the Royal Arch of Jerusalem by Charter of Compact" and was himself the first "Grand Master of the Most Excellent Chapter or Fourth Degree".

The insistence of those days that the Royal Arch was a Fourth Degree apparently continued until the general negotiation which led to the Union of 1813 when it was agreed that "pure Ancient Masonry consists of three degrees and no more namely those of Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft and Master Mason including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch."

In Scotland the Royal Arch is regarded as a fourth degree, but not so in Ireland.

The qualifications required of a candidate for the Royal Arch have from time to time varied and are in fact now different in England Scotland Ireland and America.

In England a Master Mason may be exalted to the Degree, the ceremony being in a properly constituted Chapter which is attached to and takes the name and number of a warranted Lodge.

In Scotland the Craft mason must take the Mark and Excellent Master degrees before he can become a Royal Arch Mason. The Mark degree he takes in a Craft Lodge or in a Royal Arch Chapter, the Excellent Master in a Royal Arch Chapter.

In Ireland the Craft mason before he can become a Royal Arch Mason must take the Mark degree which he can only do in a Royal Arch Chapter in which there are three further grades, Excellent, Super Excellent and Royal Arch.

In the United States only Masters and Past Masters in the craft are eligible for the degree and it is for this reason that a constructive Past Masters degree is worked since otherwise there would be insufficient candidates for the Royal Arch. Many members of the Chapter will remember American service men who visited our lodges during the war years had taken this degree without ever being the Master of their Lodge. In America also there are four grades Mark Mason, Past Master Most Excellent Master and Royal Arch which are taken in that order.

Just as the qualification for the Degree has varied from time to time and is still different in the various countries so the Legend upon which the story unfolded in the actual ceremony has varied and still varies

The English Royal Arch adopted the legend of the Rebuilding of the Temple.

The Irish adopts the story of the Repairing of the Temple.

The Chief officers in the English legend are Z. H and J.

The Chief officers in the Irish Legend are Josiah the King, Hilkiah the Priest and Shaphan the Scribe.

America takes the English Legend but borrows the names of the principals from the Irish story.

Scotland takes the English legend and principals.

The significance of the fact that the English legend is based on the Rebuilding of the Temple whilst the Irish is based on the Repairing of the Temple can best be appreciated by a very brief glance at the History of the Temple of King Solomon. After the death of King Solomon ten of the tribes whose banners are depicted in the Chapter broke away to form an independent Kingdom leaving only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin to hold the stronghold at Jerusalem. From time to time for nearly 400 years Palestine was devastated in wars between Syria and Egypt until in the 5th year of the reign of Rehoboam the King of Egypt sacked Jerusalem and carried off all the gold from the Temple but leaving the famous brasswork. At about this time the ten independent tribes were attacked overcome and removed into captivity but for the two tribes which remained. Hezekiah secured peace by paying tribute and he was allowed to restore Temple worship with the result that some eighty

years later Josiah was able to repair the Temple and refurnish it with vessels of gold. It was at this time that Shaphan found the lost volumes of the Sacred Law in the Treasury, thus forming the basis of the Irish Legend. Shortly after this repair and refurnishing Nebuchadnezzar had his own nominee ruling in Jerusalem, a nominee who turned traitor and was about to hand over Jerusalem to the Egyptians when his plot was discovered. As a result the Temple was destroyed and all the vessels of gold and brass were carried off to Babylon with the descendants of the two tribes, but General Nabuzaradan left behind the poorer types and those who "basely fled" for the purpose of tilling the ground.

Cyrus, King of Persia who now in turn overthrew the Assyrians and occupied Babylon invited the two tribes to return and to rebuild the City and Holy Temple and after delays caused by the death of Cyrus and a change of heart on the part of his successor, Zerubbabel accompanied by Joshua carried out the work. It will be seen that Z. H. and J. were associated in the work not in the days of Cyrus as our Legend has it but about a century later. Ezra and Nehemiah figure in the English and Scottish working of the degree but as a matter of pure history this is incorrect inasmuch as it has been established that Ezra arrived in Jerusalem 58 years after the rebuilding of the Temple and not at the time the ground was prepared for the foundation whilst Nehemiah was some twenty years later still.

From these variations it will be seen that the degree as worked in England is a fabrication based upon various facts which have been gathered together from different periods of history to make one workable whole into which the teachings of the Degree can be fashioned.