

FRANCIS BURGESS CHAPTER No. 9287

Consecrated at Kings Heath, Birmingham on 30th September 1991

ORATION DELIVERED BY THIRD PROVINCIAL GRAND PRINCIPAL

E. Companion D.A. KING, P.G.Std.B.

M.E. Grand Superintendent, E. Companions, Companions -

I shall find it difficult enough to encompass the generality of my subject, the Nature and Purpose of our Order, within the time available to me. Of necessity, therefore, I shall be unable to make more than a fleeting reference to the history of the Order, from the middle part of the 18th century when it was adopted by the Antients to the early part of the 19th century when it was accepted by the Moderns and enabled the 1813 Act of Union to be achieved, and how it has prospered and increased in importance and relevance in the succeeding years. Neither can I do more than remind you of, and recommend to your study and consideration, the biblical stories upon which our ritual and ceremonies are based, notably the building of the second of three temples at Jerusalem by Zerubbabel, Haggai, Joshua and Zechariah - why does he not figure in our ritual too? Companions, as we proceed shortly to the consecration of this new Chapter, let us remember the passwords which are given to a candidate for exaltation and which lead to the Supreme Degree of a Royal Arch Mason. They are "Ammi Ruhammah", which signify "My people having obtained mercy". This is the teaching, this the thought, this the underlying current of the whole of the ritual of our Order. The Royal Arch carries on the sequence of the previous degrees in Freemasonry, and fittingly concludes and rounds off the whole by a symbolic view of that heavenly Jerusalem to which we all hope to attain.

In the First Degree, we see the entry of a new member, by means of a symbolic birth, into what to him is a new and strange form of existence. Here at the very beginning of his Masonic career the candidate is required to affirm publicly his belief in God and to proclaim openly that in God is all his trust.

In the Second Degree, the teaching that the mysteries of nature and science come from God and are dependent upon his laws is defined and laid down with emphasis. We learn to study the relation of man to nature, of man to man and man to God, thereby forming character and squaring the desire of the human heart with the love of God. In the Third Degree, we are taught that honour, truth, justice and fidelity are not merely words but are the very foundations upon which this world must rest. Also that those virtues lead to the everlasting hope that beyond this world's work and suffering and sorrow, there is a land of pure delight, where saints immortal reign in the presence of the Most High.

Thus, having symbolically passed through the stages of birth, life and death, we are confronted with the purpose and the meaning of it all as expressed in the teachings of the Holy Royal Arch Degree, to glorify and worship the True and Ever Living God Most High. The true import of these teachings is to reform human character and conduct by a gradual process upon a basis of mutual love and service, which can only be brought into actual being by means of a foundation clearly defined and definitely accepted of a belief in a Supreme Being and the voluntary adoption of a tie of Brotherhood between man and man by reason of his common origin. The reformation of character, the exercise of intellectual faculties, the perfection of self knowledge in the man who is master of himself, of his soul and of his fate - all these lead us on to seek for the source of all things visible and invisible. It is obvious that there has to be, that there is, something at the back of all these things, some great power which transcends ordinary powers, some great Being who is above all other beings. Here the Royal Arch supplies the want of the other degrees, provides the missing cope-stone, and leads us into the presence of the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last, the Almighty. The immensity and the grandeur and the power of the Most High are amply demonstrated in His Works, but whilst pointing out these qualities, the Royal Arch is dearest to us in that it brings out to the fullest extent His mercy and His love.

We who are experienced Royal Arch Masons will surely be able to understand why, many years ago, a famous Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of the Antients described this degree as "the root heart and marrow of Freemasonry". We also know why we regard it with such great affection and find it of so much help and comfort in our lives. As Companions of the Order, it is our duty to support and encourage each other in all that we do, or try to do. The word "Companion" originates from the Latin and literally means "sharer of bread" - in the context of the services a modern translation might be "messmates". It actually stems from warfare when each man's life could depend upon his comrades in battle, and the man with whom you shared your bread was the man alongside whom you met the enemy. It implies the strongest of bonds, demanding loyalty and unselfish trust. For these reasons it implies an even greater tie than that between brothers in the Craft, and is a title of which we are justly proud. It demands the highest standards of conduct in our personal lives, since this tie must never be abused. You will know that in recent years, the principles and the ideals for which we stand have been questioned and even occasionally denounced - by the media, by certain elements of the police force and most sadly by some members of the Cloth - but happily those criticisms seem now to be less frequent as the true ideals of the Order become more widely known. It behoves all of us, in this modern age, when standards of living seem more important than standards of conduct, when there seems so much disrespect for law and order and when moral standards are so lax, to hold fast to that which is good, to stand firm by the tenets upon which our

Order is founded and to be faithful to our God, our country and our Queen. I made reference earlier to the bonds which exist between Companions and which are exemplified by that word. I think that no one is likely to quarrel with my assertion that similar ties exist, indeed must exist, between personnel in the police forces. They are charged with the task of preserving the peace and good order of the nation, and this they do with exemplary devotion to duty and a praiseworthy high success rate. While it is sad that there are expressed from time to time criticisms of our Order from within the Force, it is a source of great joy, comfort and encouragement that so many individual police officers, serving and retired, see nothing incompatible between the nature and purpose of their avocation and our Order.

Particularly do we in the Province of Worcestershire rejoice that colleagues in the police force in and around the County saw fit to pursue the fellowship of Freemasonry in the Francis Burgess Lodge No. 9287, consecrated on 16th May 1989 by the R.W. Provincial Grand Master, and that now, little more than two years later, acknowledging that Craft work is unfinished until completed by that of the Royal Arch, some of them are here present for the consecration of the Francis Burgess Chapter. I shall not repeat what was said by the Provincial Grand Chaplain at that earlier ceremony about Francis Burgess himself, some details also being shown on the summons for this meeting. Suffice it to say that we meet today to pray for God's blessing on this new Chapter and to dedicate its future to God, to the Order and to a continuation of the service to their fellow men already evinced by the Founder Companions.

May its light shine through posterity for generations to come.

Finally, Brethren and Companions, be ye all of one heart and one mind, love one another, and live in peace; and may the God of love and peace delight to dwell with you and bless you.