

Higher Degrees Handbook



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Freemason Series

THE HIGHER DEGREES HANDBOOK

by J.S.M. Ward

PREFACE.

In attempting to give an outline sketch of the various degrees in Freemasonry in a book of his description, I am faced by many difficulties, not the least of which is how to write in an interesting way about degrees, which many of my readers have not taken, without giving way more than is permissible.

One of my reasons for writing this book is to encourage Brethren to take these "Advanced degrees." We still meet Brethren who say that there is nothing beyond the Craft worth taking. As one who has taken all the degrees for which he is qualified, I can state from personal experience that, with one or two small exceptions, practically all the degrees are of the greatest value.

Of course, my readers must bear in mind that a Brother gets out of Masonry in proportion to what he brings into it. If he approaches it with a keen intellectual mind, based on a reasonable amount of study of the meaning of symbolism, he naturally will learn far more than if he approaches it merely from the point of view of a man who knows a good dinner when he eats one, and cares nothing about the meaning of the ceremonies which take place in the Lodge Room.

In conclusion I must express my indebtedness to Messrs. Toye & Co. for the loan of the blocks which illustrate this book.

J.S.M.W.

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CHAPTER 1. **HISTORICAL SURVEY.**

The early history of the so-called “Higher Degrees” is even more obscure than that of the Craft, and in consequence a tendency has grown up to regard them as “Manufactured” during the 18th century.

In my opinion this is too hasty a conclusion, for some of these degrees at any rate bear every evidence of antiquity, and contain that wisdom which has been handed down from generation to generation.

The third degree clearly foreshadows a subsequent degree, wherein the lost s...s will be finally recovered, in fact without such a degree the whole of the Craft ceremonies would be meaningless. Moreover, as we shall show later, the most important Higher Degrees use Sns. of great antiquity, which have been clearly handed down from ancient days in precisely the same way as have our Craft Sns., of which full evidence has been given in the History Handbook. There is also documentary evidence to show that the legends of some of these degrees were well known by our medieval ancestors, and actually incorporated in the Ancient Charges. As, for example, the two pillars which were set up before the flood, survived that deluge, and were subsequently re-discovered by masons. This legend forms the theme of the 13th degree of the A. and A. Rite which is called the Royal Arch of Enoch.

The earliest printed references to any of the Higher Degrees are to the Royal Arch in 1741, and to the Royal Order of Scotland in 1743, when it was in such a vigorous state of health that it had a Provincial Grand Lodge in London, with at least two Chapters under its control.

The Higher Degrees appear to fall into three main groups:-(1) Those that extend the story of the Craft; (2) Those which purport to restore the lost S..s; and (3) The Chivalric Degrees. With regard to the first group two tendencies seem to have been at work during the 18th century. The one being to cut out of the Craft various parts of the legend, and the other being to enlarge certain incidents referred to in the Craft stories, add picturesque detail, and evolve out of them a new degree. My own conviction is that the root matter of nearly all the Higher Degrees comes from traditions and legends cherished by our medieval predecessors.

There is no doubt that all our rituals, the Craft included, underwent considerable revision during the 18th century. In the case of the Craft Degrees a considerable amount of excision was necessitated by the alteration of the clause in the constitution which changed Masonry

from a Christian to a non-Christian basis. This process of excision of all Christian references was not completed until the time of the Treaty of Union, in 1813, and one example for England will suffice. Dunckley, in the second half of the 18th century, declared that the "Blazing Star" meant the star at Bethlehem which guided the wise men to the infant Christ. In Scotland to this day there still survives a distinct reference to the Christ in the Craft Degrees, for the V.S.L. is opened by the D.C. with a quotation from the opening verse of the gospel of St. John, - "In the beginning was the Word," - whilst the Lodge is closed with the following quotation from the same source, "And the Word was with God." Now this clearly indicates the existence of a Christian explanation of the lost S..s which, though no longer countenanced in the Craft Degrees in England, survives in such degrees as the Rose Croix.

We thus see that anything Christian was eliminated from the lower degrees, and this explains the probable origin of some of the Higher Degrees. At the same time, the general style of our Craft Rituals has been altered. Apparently in early days the actual part taken by the candidate during the ceremony was comparatively small, and the bulk of the work consisted of lectures, some parts being by question and answer, while other parts contained various legends connected with the Order. Gradually the tendency arose to make the candidate take a more active and dramatic part in the ceremony, and in order to do this legends and incidents which did not immediately connect with the main theme began to be dropped. These parts were prized by the older members, and rather than see them perish they made them into side Degrees, nor are we justified in assuming that they invented the Sn..s to go with these degrees. In the Royal Order of Scotland to-day the bulk of the ceremony consists of questions and answers put by the M. to the Wardens, and include the giving of S..ns at certain points in the catechism, which S..ns, however, are not specifically taught to the candidate. No doubt when similar portions were cut out and became Christian degrees the Sns. went with them, and naturally became tests to prove that a Brother had taken this new Side Degree, which was nevertheless in reality very ancient.

A characteristic example of a degree which has been cut out of an existing craft degree is the Mark, which was almost certainly part of the ceremony of a F.C., although no doubt it has been amplified since it started on its independent career. On the other hand some of the intermediate degrees of the A. and A Rite, such as the Knights Elect of Nine, are merely amplifications of incidents dismissed in a few words in the Craft ceremony. The Knights Elect of Nine relates in dramatic form the apprehension of one of the criminals.

To an entirely different order belong degrees like the Royal Arch, the Royal Order of Scotland, and the Rose Croix. Each of these in its own way claims to be the completing degree, in which the lost s..s are discovered. The explanation in the case of the last two is Christian, in the case of the R.A. non-Christian, whilst their survival indicates the existence of two diametrically opposed traditions. The Christian Degrees represent the solution put forward in Medieval times, whereas the R.A., though now overlaid with Jewish matter taken from the O.T. in the 18th century, has still within it traces of a tradition which goes

right back to pre-Christian times, and clearly comes in part from Egypt, and in part from India.

The third group claim to carry on the teaching of the Chivalric Orders of the Middle Ages, and contain evidence of a mystical tradition which was not entirely orthodox. A characteristic example of these degrees is the Knights Templar.

With regard to these Chivalric Degrees, it may at first sight appear difficult to justify the claim of a building guild to be linked in any way with the proudest Order of Chivalry known to exist in the Middle Ages, but those who hastily brush away this tradition ignore certain salient features of the Templar organization. The Templars contained at least three sections, or sub-orders, within their ranks, i.e., the Knights themselves, the Templar Priests, and the so-called Serving Brethren, among whom were many Masons.

When the Order was suppressed thousands of Knights escaped the general persecution, and simply disappeared from history. How did they do it, and what became of them? The most reasonable explanation is that they disguised themselves as Serving Brothers and Lay Brothers of the Temple, and were shielded by these humbler members of their own Order, who entirely escaped persecution. I have gone into this question at great length in "Freemasonry and the Ancient Gods," and will therefore content myself by saying here that there was undoubtedly a link between Masonry and the Templars, which is quite sufficient to explain a partial survival of Templar Rites among the Masonic Brotherhood. The Templars certainly had a mystical teaching very similar to that enshrined in Freemasonry, and traces of it can still be detected in the present rituals of the Masonic Knights Templar, despite the fact that they have been considerably revised in the last half century .

CHAPTER 2. THE MARK DEGREE.

Those of my readers who have already studied the first three Handbooks of this series will realize that the true S.s of a M.M. are not restored to them. The real S.. which was lost was comprehension of the Nature of God, and our Third Degree quite clearly indicates that, despite popular beliefs, we shall not be able to comprehend God as soon as we are dead. The Craft degrees, in short, take us through birth, life and death, and shadow forth the Creative, Preservative and Destructive sides of the Deity. The majority of the other degrees either deal with what befalls a man after death, or else endeavor to explain, or fill in, certain gaps in that historic narrative which is the allegorical basis of the Craft Degrees.

The Mark degree in part belongs to the latter group, and is in reality the completion of the Second Degree. Unquestionably a Brother should receive his Mark when he becomes a F.C., and the degree itself still shows strong operative influence.

It is ruled by Mark Grand Lodge, which meets and has its offices at the Temple in Great Queen Street, next door to the Connaught Rooms. All who love the Higher Degrees owe a debt of gratitude to Mark Grand Lodge, which has acted as Fairy Godmother to many of the Higher Degrees which were left stranded after the Treaty of Union in 1813. Indeed, in many cases it has more or less taken them under its wing, and in consequence we shall have to refer again and again to the fact that the Grand Body which rules a particular degree has its Head Quarters at "Mark Mason's Hall."

The Mark Degree has its own regalia and a special jewel, and perhaps our younger Brethren will be glad of the warning that, with the exception of the R.A., no jewels of the Higher Degree may be worn in a Craft Lodge.

The jewel of the Mark Degree consists of a keystone, made usually of white cornelian, on which are engraved certain mystic letters, the meaning of which are revealed to members of the Degree. It is suspended from a blue and red ribbon. The aprons and collars are also made of blue and red silk.

The teaching of this Degree is largely an amplification of the Second, and tells of education and reward for labor. It also contains a dramatic warning against attempting to obtain wages to which we are not justly entitled, and there is a Messianic hint in the fact "That the stone which the builders rejected has become the headstone of the corner." Incidentally the stone is a keystone, hence the origin of the jewel of the degree.

Several facts lead us to suspect that at one time the Degree may have been more pronouncedly Christian than it is to-day. We know that it was flourishing as far back as 1760 in Lodges attached to the Ancients, who were unquestionably strongly pro-Christian.

The legend as now given relates to a period in the building of the Temple previous to the tragedy, although there is abundant evidence to show that as late as the time of the formation of Mark Grand Lodge, 1856, many Mark Lodges in the North had a somewhat similar legend to that now used, but associated it with the second Temple instead of with the first.

Mark therefore, is, or should be, really part of our Craft system, and in Scotland Craft Lodges still have the power to confer it, and constantly do so. In that country it is a necessary qualification for the Excellent Master which itself is an essential qualification for the Royal Arch. We shall refer to the Excellent Master more fully when we come to the Royal Arch, but it is desirable to point out that in Scotland Royal Arch Chapters also have the right to confer the Mark Degree, if a candidate has not already taken it in his Craft Lodge.

The Mark, as we have said, is the completion of the Second Degree, and in itself contains what are practically two degrees, namely, Mark Man and Mark Master. There has been much learned controversy as to whether the Mark Master was at one time conferred on a man as soon as he received his Second Degree. Since it is impossible at the moment to decide when the Mark Degrees arose in their present form, all we can say definitely is that so far as documentary evidence goes, i.e., back to 1760, it appears as if there were always the Degrees of Mark Man and Mark Master, and that although at any rate in theory, Mark Man might be conferred on a F.C., Mark Master seems always to have been restricted to Master Masons. In modern times both Mark Degrees are conferred together, and always on a M.M., although the Mark ritual throughout emphasizes the connection with the Second Degree.

THE ARK MARINER.

The Mark Degree, or Degrees, also have associated with them, but in a separate "Lodge," the Royal Ark Mariner Degree. This appears to be old "Operative" work, probably built up in the 18th century by genuine operative masons in the North of England, anxious to have some way of distinguishing a real "Working" mason from a "Speculative." The same explanation probably brought into existence the Degree of St. Laurence the Martyr, of which more anon. The Ark Mariner legend relates to the Deluge, and is taken direct from the Bible. The most interesting features are the use of a stone, instead of the V.S.L., on which to take the Ob.. The reason for this is explained in the ritual, but it may be that we have here a survival of the old custom of swearing on a stone altar, which was the earliest form of a binding oath. There is also some interesting work with a triangle, but in the main it must be confessed that there is not much really deep teaching in the Degree. It is, however, quite a pretty little Degree, and has many ardent supporters. It is under the direct rule of Mark Grand Lodge.

CHAPTER 3. THE HOLY ROYAL ARCH OF JERUSALEM.

The Mark completes the Second Degree, but to the youngest Master Mason it must be obvious that a further degree is needed to complete the Third Degree.

The genuine S..s were lost; but were they never re-discovered? Moreover, since they were known to three people, why could not the two survivors have appointed a successor and given him the lost S..s? The Royal Arch sets out to give at any rate one answer to the question - "What were the Gen. S..s of a M.M.?"

Briefly, it is a lost W., but that W. conveys in symbolism a most interesting and illuminating explanation of the nature of God. Indeed, the teaching of the Craft may be summed up by saying that it teaches a man his duty to his neighbor, whereas the "Arch"

instructs him in his duty towards God. What is the nature of God therein depicted? It is a trinity, but not the Christian Trinity; it is more like the Hindoo Trinity of Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer. It also clearly indicates the union of Body, Soul, and Spirit, and shows that by that Union we become united with God. Thus, in its very essence the Royal Arch is supremely mystical, and teaches of the Beatific Vision.

The legend deals with the "Discovery" of the lost S.s at the re-building of the Temple after the return from the Captivity. It will thus be seen that the "Setting" of the degree is from the Old Testament, and this fact must be noted, for there is another explanation of the "Lost Word" which is given in some of the other "Higher" degrees, namely, that the "Lost Word" is Christ, the Logos.

But we have not yet obtained an answer to the very natural question, "Why could not the other two, who knew the S., appoint a successor?" The full exoteric explanation, and also how it was that the S.s came to be deposited in a place of security is given in one of the "Cryptic Degrees," to which we shall refer later in this book. Briefly however, three persons were necessary in order to convey it, but in reality, of course, this is symbolism, and implies that Body, Soul and Spirit must be in union before they can fully comprehend the Divine Trinity. While, on the one hand, no living man, trammelled by the bonds of the flesh, can really comprehend the nature of God, nor even do so immediately after death, for our souls will not yet be sufficiently evolved, on the other, hand it is clearly taught that our body does not completely perish, but is rather transmuted, even as St. Paul himself says will take place at the day of judgment. This is no doubt a very profound dogma and difficult for us to understand, but if we can realize the fact that matter as well as Spirit is in its original a manifestation of God, and therefore a part of Him, we shall perceive that Matter also is indestructible, although its form may change. This fact is perfectly well recognised by modern science.

In the original form of the Royal Arch, which still survives in Bristol, in Scotland, and in America, the Candidate must pass through four veils, which correspond to various spiritual states of existence which lie beyond the grave, each being a little nearer to the Divine Being than was the previous one. The four Veils are coloured respectively Blue, purple, red and white, and at each Veil the Candidate is challenged by a "Guardian of the Veil" who demands of him the W. and Sn. of the previous Veil. This ceremony in Scotland forms a distinct degree known as the Excellent Master, and the Jewel thereof is a pentacle set with brilliants, which jewel, of course, represents, among other things, man and his five senses. The penal S. of this degree is of great antiquity, and is made by Vishnu when in the form of the Lion Incarnation. Vishnu descended to earth to overthrow an evil giant which was oppressing the world, and slew him by disemboweling him. In Scotland no English Royal Arch Mason can be admitted to a Scotch Chapter unless he previously receives the Degree of Excellent Master, which degree he cannot receive unless he has first taken the Mark.

The Passing of the White Veil is really an integral part of the Arch ceremony, and the Sn. corresponding to the S.s of the other Veils is one well known to English Royal Arch Masons. It is only after having passed this barrier that the candidate is enabled to obtain the real S.s of an M.M., the ceremony being very similar to our own Royal Arch. In other words, it is only when we have passed through various spiritual stages of existence that we shall at length be able to comprehend the nature of God. The deletion of the Veils from our ceremony has tended to obscure this important lesson in the English form of the R.A.

A slightly different lesson is taught us by the fate of our predecessor in the Craft. He could not have revealed the S. even if he had wished to do so, for it was an experience, and therefore could not be communicated by words to any living man. We cannot go into a detailed explanation of this deeply mystical ceremony in a book of this nature, but a brief explanation of a certain vault which plays a prominent part therein is essential. Like all symbols in Freemasonry it has several meanings, but the two most important are (a), the underworld, or the grave into which man descends at death, and from which his Soul ultimately ascends to realms of Light. (b) The Mystical interpretation is that it is the M.Ch., that dark recess of the Soul, where dwells the Divine Spark.

The jewel of this degree depicts quite clearly the nature of God. The Double Triangle within the Circle and the Point therein, which is represented by the All-Seeing Eye, is the age-old symbol for God. The triangle within the Circle represents the Spirit within the Circle of Infinity, and is peculiarly associated with God the Creator. R.A. Masons will perceive the significance of this fact in connection with the Altar. The Point within a Circle, among the Hindoos, stands for Paramatma, the All-pervading, the Source and End of All. The triangle with the point downwards is the symbol of rain (water) and represents the preservative side of God (Vishnu), while the triangle with the point upward represents fire, whose flames go up to Heaven, and is therefore the emblem of the Destructive, or rather the Transformative, side of God (Shiva). This great symbol was sacred to Babylonian, Egyptian and Jew, and had to each the same inner meaning. It is also sacred to the modern Hindoo, and was so to the ancient Mexican, and indeed is one of the most venerated symbols in the world.

It will thus be seen that the jewel of the R.A., far from being a mere ornament, contains in itself a summary of the sublime teachings of that degree; the more so as it also has a triple tau. With regard to the tau cross, we have already shown in our earlier handbooks that in its origin it was a Phallic symbol representing the Creative power. We shall remember also that we make a tau cross every time we receive the S.s in the Craft Degrees. Thus the M.M. has himself made the triple tau. It is also worth reminding our readers that only those who have passed the chair and actually ruled a Lodge are entitled to wear three tau crosses on their aprons.

As a Phallic symbol it became an emblem of the Creator, and also, in time, of our animal passions, which must be trampled under foot if we are to advance in Spiritual knowledge.

By the time we have reached the Arch, symbolically this has been done, and we are reminded of this by the Union of these three taus beneath the triangles, emblems of the spirit. Though this is essentially a non-Christian degree we cannot forget that there were three Crosses on Calvary.

The presence of the triple tau, after the experience we have had of it in the Craft, shows how carefully each degree leads on to the next, and it also conveys this important lesson. Each degree in the Craft taught the evolution and purification of (1) the body; (2) the soul; (3) the spirit. These three, now in perfect union, rest under the Shadow of the Supreme Being depicted by the Double Triangles. Thus the presence of the tau crosses teaches us that Man will ultimately rest in the Presence of the King of Kings.

In fact the Royal Arch is full of interesting symbolism: the colours of the regalia, red and purple, the shape of the altar, the position of the three Principals, all convey important lessons, but we cannot spare the space in a small Handbook like this to enlarge further on this degree. Nevertheless, one cannot omit pointing out that as in the Craft the W.M. represented the Spirit, the S.W. the Soul, and the J.W. the Body, so do the corresponding officers in the R.A., although here they are no longer separated, but are side by side, and in all cases act as one. The reason for this is that the R.A. depicts that sublime state wherein Body, Soul and Spirit are truly one, and are at Peace in the Presence of God – now properly comprehended.

Our readers will thus perceive that no Craft Mason can consider he has fulfilled his duty as a Mason, until he has taken the Royal Arch, for he has not recovered those lost S..s which he has promised to try and find.

The regalia includes apron and a sash of purple and red.

CHAPTER 4. THE CRYPTIC DEGREES.

The Cryptic Degrees are four in number and are ruled by a Grand Council of their own which, however, in reality is in close alliance with Mark Grand Lodge, whose Hall is their Head Quarters.

They are “The Most Excellent Master,” “The Royal Master,” “The Select Master,” and “The Super-Excellent Master,” and their legends bridge the gap, historically, between the first Temple and its destruction. The “Most Excellent Master” must not be confounded with the “Excellent Master” which is worked in Scotland and is really the “Passing of the Veils” in the Royal Arch, although it is kept separate and given first. Its Legend, therefore, is associated with the Second Temple, while the “Most Excellent Master” on the contrary deals with the completion and dedication of the first temple. The apron, which is seldom worn, is white edged with purple, and there is a purple collar. The colour refers to the grief felt by the Brethren for the loss of the third Principal, whose chair is vacant. The most

striking feature in the Lodge room is a small replica of the Ark of the Covenant. In theory the qualification for the “Most Excellent Master” is only Mark, but as it is always followed by the “Royal Master,” for which the Qualification is Mark and Arch, in practice the Cand. must hold both these degrees.

The Royal Master is a most interesting degree, for it shows how the R.A. S..s came to be deposited in the place in which they were subsequently found. Though H.A.B.’s chair was vacant in the “Most Excellent Master,” in the Royal Master he is the chief character, and his disquisition on the subject of “Death” is one of the most beautiful pieces of ritual in Freemasonry.

The apron in this degree is black, edged with red, but it is seldom worn. The three Principals, however, wear robes similar to those worn by the same officers in the R.A.

The “Select Master,” unlike the preceding degrees, has a special jewel of its own, namely a silver trowel within a triangle of the same metal, which is suspended from a black collar edged and lined with red. The apron is white, edged with red and gold, and is of a triangular shape, but in England neither it nor the jewel are usually worn. In Scotland the jewel of the Cryptic Degrees combines the triangle and the trowel, whereas in England we wear the Jewel of the “Super-Excellent Master” to represent all four degrees.

The “Select Master” is supposed to be held in a crypt (hence the name “Cryptic Degrees”) which is the same crypt in which the S..s of the R.A. were at a later date discovered. The legend is similar to that of one of the degrees of the Ancient and Accepted Rite, and relates how a well known mason employed by K.S. accidentally intruded into this crypt when K.S. and H., K. of T., were present. The intruder was subsequently pardoned, but the O.G. who should have prevented his entry, was punished in his place. This is undoubtedly an old legend which crops up again in a third degree, namely, the “Grand Tyler of K.S.” one of the Allied Degrees. Its symbolic meaning is that those who push their occult investigation beyond reasonable limits, and without the assistance and protection of more experienced investigators, run serious risks.

The “Super-Excellent Master” is short and not very interesting, but it brings the story of the first Temple down to the time of its threatened destruction and so bridges the gap between the “Most Excellent Master” and the R.A.. The lesson taught is unswerving loyalty to Jehovah. The colour of this degree is crimson, and a crimson collar should be worn. In practice, however, this is worn only by members of the Grand Council. The Jewel of these degrees is a white enamel triangle with the point downwards, that is, the triangle of the Preserver, and is as a rule the only regalia worn.

The most interesting part of this degree is a carpet on the floor with the following design thereon. Inside a square is a circle, within which is a triangle pointing towards the West,

and within the triangle is the C. of the C. on which rests an altar, and on the altar is the ark of the covenant. As the "Floor" design is not adequately explained, the following will be of use.

The triangle pointing West is the symbol of the Preserver, and has been adopted as the jewel of all these degrees in England, and it certainly denotes the underlying principle of the series.

(1). The "Most Excellent Master" teaches us that despite the loss of the chief architect God preserved the work of the Temple and it was duly completed.

(2). The "Royal Master" tells us how the R.A.S.s came to be preserved.

(3). In the "Select Master" the over zealous friend of K.S. was preserved from the dire fate which threatened him.

(4). In the "Super-Excellent Master" we are shown how God preserved a remnant of the people because they preserved their faith in Him.

The triangle within a square denotes the Descent of the Spirit into Matter, while the Circle symbolizes Infinity - whence the Spirit comes. The point links the Infinite with the emblem for the All-Pervading - it also refers to each individual "Ego."

The whole symbol, therefore, means that God the Preserver descended from Eternity, and entering into Matter became flesh, and He is one with the All-Pervading. It is therefore a most sacred emblem, and the fact that the Ark of the Covenant stands on the C. shows that the New Dispensation arises out of the old, and the Prophetic reference to this fact is emphasized by the real g. which should remind us of Him Who died upon the Cross. Thus this degree has a Messianic, esoteric meaning, often overlooked by those who have taken it.

CHAPTER V. THE ALLIED DEGREES.

Under this heading are grouped a number of different degrees having little in common. In theory the Grand Council which meets at Mark Masons' Hall controls a large number of degrees, including five which are androgamous, but in practice they only work six degrees. At Newcastle-on-Tyne, however, the Time Immemorial Council also works one or two others, including the Royal Arch Knight Templar Priest, a highly mystical and beautiful ceremony.

The six degrees worked in London are not restricted to Christians, and the only qualifications are Mark and Arch. This is despite the fact that St. Laurence the Martyr and

the Knights of Constantinople are clearly Christian degrees. Most of these degrees are of secondary importance, but the Red Cross of Babylon and the High Priest are old and important. The degrees are as follows:-

(1). St. Laurence the Martyr. The Jewel is a gridiron, and it is quite possible that it is to this fact that we owe the ribald tales current in the outside world as to what befalls a man at his initiation into Freemasonry. The legend of this degree in reality has nothing whatever to do with Freemasonry, and is well known to every student of Medieval legends of the Saints. The lesson taught is that of fortitude. This degree appears to be a piece of old Operative ritual brought from Lancashire, and original only worked up into a degree in order to enable a genuine "Working mason" to distinguish other Operatives from "These newfangled Speculatives."

(2). The Knights of Constantinople is associated with the Emperor Constantine, and inculcates the useful lesson of universal equality. The Jewel is a cross surmounted by a crescent moon, hardly a happy choice, for it suggests the triumph of the Crescent over the Cross.

(3). The Secret Monitor is very similar to the first degree of the Secret Monitor as worked by the Grand Conclave, and is associated with David and Jonathan. Its presence among the Allied Degrees bears testimony to an unfortunate split which occurred during the early years of the organization of the Grand Conclave of the Secret Monitor. It is the only degree in English Freemasonry which is under the control of two entirely distinct bodies. The Jewel is a "Hackle" suspended from a crown, and on the ribbon above the jewel is a bow.

(4). The Grand Tyler of King Solomon relates the story of the accidental intrusion of a F.C. into the secret vaults where K.S., K.H. of T., and H.A.B. were met in consultation. The legend is very similar to that related in the "Select Master" though there are interesting variations, in particular. "The Period" of the legend being earlier. The Jewel is the triangle of the Preserver, point downwards, with certain Hebrew letters engraven in gilt upon a black enamel background.

All these degrees are interesting, but can hardly be called really important, whereas the next two stand in quite a different category.

(5). The Red Cross of Babylon is undoubtedly old, and the sixteenth degree of the A. and A. Rite also bears on the same theme, while similar incidents likewise occur in the Royal Order of Scotland. The Degree in historical order follows, and is closely associated with, the Royal Arch and the rebuilding of the second Temple, and in Scotland is actually controlled by the Supreme Royal Arch Chapter. It has many interesting details, but its outstanding feature is the crossing of the Bridge. This, although transformed into a physical and historical bridge, undoubtedly symbolizes something quite different. We are

here in the region of eschatology and are being told what befalls a man after death. In all the great religions of the world there is a tradition that sooner or later after death the soul must cross a certain "Bridge." Clearly this "Bridge" means the passing from one state of existence in the world beyond the grave to another, and indicates a further advancement of the Soul away from earth conditions and towards God. The Japanese, Chinese, Parsees, Mahomedans, and Medieval Christians, all speak of this bridge. For example, the Parsees say that the mourners must rise at dawn on the third day after the death of their friend and pray for him, for at that hour he comes to the bridge which he must cross to reach Paradise. The bridge spans the gulf of Hell, and in the middle of the Bridge the Soul will be met by a female form. If his life has been good this form will be that of a beautiful woman who will lead him into Paradise, but if his life has been evil it will be a hideous hag who will meet him and fling him from the bridge into the bottomless pit.

In England this bridge was called "The Brig of Dread," and is depicted in a twelfth century fresco at Chaldon Church, Surrey, where it is shown as if built like a saw. Among those attempting to cross it is a Mason with his tools in his hand. It is also spoken of in an old Lancashire dirge which relates what befalls the Soul of the dead man immediately after it has left its dead body.

"When thou from hence away art passed Every night and alle; To whinny-muir thou comest at last And Christ receive thy soule." "From whinny-muir when thou mayest pass Every night and alle; To 'Brig of Dread' thou comest at last And Christ receive thy soule."

The exoteric lesson of the degree is "Great is Truth," but the hidden reference to the Bridge of Testing which the soul must pass on its journey towards Paradise is the most striking feature. The Jewel is two crossed swords on a dark green background of enamel.

(6). The High Priest, unlike the other degrees, can only be conferred on a mason who has been a 3rd Principal in a R.A. Chapter. It deals with the Priesthood "after the Order of Melchisedic," and the jewel is the triangle with the point upwards, on which is imposed a mitre.

Briefly then the Allied Degrees link the Old Testament with the New, and the most important are the Red Cross of Babylon and the High Priest, although the other four are not without interest.

CHAPTER VI. THE ANCIENT AND ACCEPTED RITE.

The Rose Croix of Heredom is now regarded as the 18th Degree of the A. and A. Rite, whose total number of degrees is 33, in reference to the 33 years of our Lord's Life. In

practice, however, only the 18th, 30th, 31st, 32nd and 33rd are worked in full in England, and the last three are but sparingly conferred.

In America all the intermediate degrees are worked, i.e., 4th to 33rd inclusive, but in England the 4th to the 17th are merely conferred by name. The 18th is worked in full, but the 19th to the 29th inclusive are similarly conferred by name only.

The qualification for the 18th is one year a Master Mason, and for the 30th it has usually been Prelate or M.W.S., the latter being the title of the ruler of a Rose Croix Chapter. The 18th degree is a highly mystical degree and full of the deepest interest, and in England is restricted to professing Christians. In the U.S.A. and on the Continent of Europe, however, it is not usually regarded as Christian, and non-Christians can become members. One school of Masonic research has propounded a theory that the Rose Croix was originally Roman Catholic, and invented by the Jacobites. Personally, I have, after very careful search, been unable to find any evidence in support of this view, and frankly I cannot conceive of any conscientious Roman Catholic taking part in the ceremonies.

It seems more probable that the degree is due to Rosicrucian influence, and the earliest historic evidence we can find of these mystics shows that they were Lutheran, but it is quite probable that they inherited an earlier tradition. There appear to be references to Rosicrucian doctrines in Dante, and the Commacine Masons carved the Rose and Compasses over their Lodge door at Assisi in the opening years of the 15th century. Moreover, the ancient Aztecs who likewise venerated the cross had a very similar Rite with the same Sn..s and many of the same incidents. Finally, we cannot ignore the fact that Henry Adamson, M.A., in "The Muses Threnodie" written in 1636, says:-

"For we are Brethren of the Rosie Cross, We have the Mason's Word and Second Sight:"

Now this shows an association of the "Mason's Word" with the Rosie Cross. Personally, I think this refers, not to the present 18th degree, but to the Rosy Cross of the Royal Order of Scotland.

It indicates, however, Rosicrucian influence on Freemasonry long before the rise of the Jacobite movements, and is in a poem describing Protestant Perth.

To revert to the 18th degree as we know it to-day, we find it has four distinct sections. The first consists of the conferring by name of the intermediate degrees, and the other sections form the Rose Croix Degree itself. It is a highly mystical piece of symbolism, and expresses the passage of Man through the Valley of the Shadow of Death accompanied by the Masonic Virtues F.H. and C.. It ends with his final acceptance into the abode of Light, life and Immortality, and with his recovery of the L.W.

The Badge is twofold; on one side it is black, having in its centre a red Calvary cross; on the other side it is white, edged with rose colour; on the apron itself is embroidered a Pelican feeding its young, while on the flap is a triangle within which are certain Hebrew Characters.

There is a collar which is similarly two faced; on the reverse it is black with three red crosses, and on the front rose pink, richly embroidered. Among the symbols depicted are the crown of thorns and the serpent holding its tail in its mouth, the emblem of Eternity. The jewel which is suspended from the collar is a golden compass extended to an angle of 60 degrees, surmounted by a celestial crown. On the one side is a scarlet cross within the compasses, and beneath it a Pelican feeding its young. On the reverse the cross is silver, with a silver eagle rising towards the heavens, and on both sides at the joint of the compasses is a rose.

Despite its present Christian setting it appears that this degree in its main details is a very ancient ceremony. All its essential features are found in the Bora Ceremony of the Australian Aborigines, one of the most primitive races still living. In India and China the Sns. of this degree are associated with God the Preserver. In Ancient Egypt certain parts of the Book of the Dead cover the same ground and show the same Sns. in use. The Ancient Aztecs in Mexico appear to have had practically the same ceremony, as already stated, and some of the Sns. which they make have survived among the Red Indians to this day. In Medieval Europe we find constant examples of the use of the two principal Sns. employed, as for example at Coire Cathedral, - in both 12th and 15th century work, - in a fresco at Basle, painted in the opening years of the 16th century, and in a 17th century paneled room now in the Engadine Museum at St. Moritz. Moreover, a certain Sn. associated with the 9th degree of the A. and A. Rite which indicates sorrow is also found side by side with these Rose Croix Sns. in every one of the above mentioned cases in Europe. Facts like these cannot be brushed aside lightly, and preclude us from accepting the view that the Rose Croix was invented in the 18th century. Indeed, the Mexican Codices, which practically show the complete ceremony, are at least two and a half centuries earlier than the date at which it has been suggested that this degree was invented.

THE GRAND ELECT KNIGHT KADOSH

The other name for this, the 30th degree, is Knight of the Black and White Eagle. In Latin Countries it is strongly Templar in tone, and has acquired a sinister significance because in some of the rituals the duty of avenging the Death of Molay, and the other slaughtered Knights Templars, is taught in a dramatic way. Since the chief culprits responsible for the slaughter of Molay and his Knights were Philip, King of France, and Clement, the Pope, this fact is stated to have been utilized to teach the Cands. that King and Church are the oppressors of the People. Probably this inner meaning is by no means so universally applied on the Continent as anti-masonic writers pretend, but in any case the English Ritual has been purged of any such idea, if indeed it ever possessed it.

The degree is an elaborate one, necessitating three chambers and an ante-room when worked in full, and only the Supreme Council itself can confer it. The regalia, which may be worn in Rose Croix Chapters, consists of a broad black sash suspended from the left shoulder, the point fringed with silver bullion, and on it are embroidered the emblems of the degree. These are an eagle soaring towards the sun, holding the Anchor of Hope in his talons; on the extremity is the banner of England and Wales, which is on a red ground three golden lions; this is crossed by the banner of the Supreme Council, and below it is a red cross formed of four tau crosses, usually called the Cross of Jerusalem.

The breast jewel is a cross pattee in red enamel, with the number "30" upon a blue enamel ground in the centre. From a collarette of black ribbon with a silver edging is hung a black double spreading-eagle, surmounted by a crown, and holding a sword in its claws.

The word "Kadosh" is Hebrew, and means "separated" or "consecrated." The remaining three degrees of the Ancient and Accepted Rite are but sparingly conferred, and take the place to a large extent of Grand Rank in other, degrees.

It will be many years before the young mason attains to these exalted heights, and therefore any detailed description even of the regalia is hardly necessary in a Handbook of this nature. As soon, however, as he becomes a Rose Croix mason he is certain to have an opportunity of seeing from time to time members of these exalted degrees, and learning from them as much as he is entitled to know before they are conferred upon him.

The Ancient and Accepted Rite as now organized derives its authority from the charter granted to it in 1845 by the Supreme Council of the Southern Jurisdiction of the U.S.A., but the Rose Croix, Kadosh, the 28th degree, and several other intermediate degrees were fully established and at work in the 18th century, as historic records show, although how much further they date back is still a matter of dispute.

With regard to the intermediate degrees it is a mistake to assume that they are of no value or interest. They vary considerably in merit, but such degrees as the Royal Arch of Enoch, with its clear indication of Rosicrucian influence, and the account of the discovery of one of the Ancient Pillars inscribed with old time learning, (mentioned in the Ancient Charges), is worthy of careful study, and the same is true of several of the other degrees. For this reason I strongly urge all Rose Croix Masons to attend the annual festival of King Edward VII. Rose Croix Chapter of Improvement, which is held in the Spring each year at Mark Masons' Hall, when two of the intermediate degrees are rehearsed in full.

This then is the Ancient and Accepted Rite; a great Rite undoubtedly, which is full of mystical lore, and sets out to show its members that the quest of the lost word ends, not at the Temple at Jerusalem, but on Mount Calvary.

CHAPTER VII

THE ROYAL ORDER OF SCOTLAND

This Order rules two degrees, the Harodim and the Rosy Cross. The Harodim is conferred in a body called a Chapter, and so in this Order a Chapter is below a Lodge. In practice, however, these two bodies are the same.

The Royal Order has many peculiar features, and it is impossible to do it justice in one chapter of this book.

Firstly, we may note that the Order is unique in that it has one governing body for the whole world, and is the only English Masonic body of which this is true. Grand Lodge must always meet in Scotland.

Qualifications, as laid down by the Grand Lodge in Scotland, is five years a Master Mason, but the Metropolitan Provincial Grand Lodge in practice will only admit members of the 30th degree of the Ancient and Accepted Rite. London Masons, who have not attained to that degree, must therefore go to the Provincial Grand Lodge of the Southern Counties, which meets at Windsor.

These degrees are of great antiquity, and, personally, I consider them the greatest of all our masonic degrees. They are not so dramatic as certain others, such as the Order of the Knights Templar, but they have a unity of purpose and an ancient ritual which is full of the most profound mystical teaching.

It is in curious old Border verse, for the most part, and from internal evidence would appear to ante-date our present form of even the Craft degrees, though it clearly presupposes their existence.

From historical records we know that these "Scotch" degrees were at work in 1743 in London, for there is a record of a Provincial Grand Lodge in London, having at least two Chapters under its control, at that time.

The mere fact that there were at least two Chapters of Harodim at work at this date precludes the possibility of the Order having come into existence in 1743, and the fact that it had to travel from Scotland, and then establish itself and spread in London, justifies us in considering that it can hardly be later in origin than the date of the formation of the Craft Grand Lodge of Scotland itself, which was in 1736. Seven years is, I consider, far too short a time to allow a new degree to spread from Scotland to London and establish itself firmly therein, but if we take this date we shall see that the Royal Order takes precedence in antiquity of any high degree. But, in view of these facts, we cannot dismiss lightly the

evidence of Henry Adamson's metrical description of Perth, "The Muses Threnodie," written in 1638, practically a century earlier, in which he writes :-

"For we are brethren of the Rosie Cross We have the Mason's Word, etc." Note. - He uses the phrase "Rosie Cross," the exact title of the 2nd degree of the Royal Order, and adds that "We have the Mason's Word."

Now the Royal Order purports to give its members the lost "Mason's Word."

Therefore, if language means anything, it means that the brethren of the Rosie Cross claimed to have the true Mason's Word, a claim still made by the Brethren of the Rosy Cross of the Royal Order.

My firm conviction is, therefore, that Adamson, who was a M.A. and a clergyman, was a member of the Royal Order of Scotland, and since the style and language of the ritual fits in with this period, or with one even earlier, I consider that the Royal Order goes back to that period at least. In connection with this it is well to remember that the first record of the initiation of a speculative into Freemasonry in England is on the 20th May, 1641, when Robert Moray, "General Quartermaster of the armie of Scotland," was initiated at Newcastle by members of the Lodge of Edinburgh, who were with the Scottish Army, which had entered England in arms against King Charles.

Moreover, Moray, was "Protector" of Vaughan, the famous 17th century Rosicrucian. If therefore beyond the Craft lay a Rosicrucian Masonic Order, which could only be entered by those who had first qualified as Freemasons, then we can see an excellent reason why Moray, who was clearly interested in Mysticism in general, and Rosicrucianism in particular, should trouble to be initiated into a Lodge despite the fact that the Army of which he was Quartermaster-General was actually on a campaign.

Incidentally, these facts go clean counter to the theory still held by a few students that the Royal Order was Jacobite. Indeed, the closer one studies this Order the less grounds can one find for this view.

In such a case one would naturally look for some reference to the Martyr King himself. Be it noted this could have been done with perfect safety, for in the Prayer Book of the Established Church of England there was, during the Eighteenth Century, a special service in memory of Charles, King and Martyr. Thus the inclusion of reference to the White Rose, or Charles the Martyr, could easily and safely have been worked into this ritual.

Secondly, let us consider the teaching of the degree. Both the Old and the Young Pretender were Roman Catholics; we should therefore expect that either there would be traces of

Roman Catholic teaching in the ritual, or at least that care would be taken to avoid anything that would be in direct opposition to the faith of the hero of the Jacobites. Yet, on looking into the ritual, we find certain most significant omissions. There is no mention of the "Holy Catholic" Church, nor of the "Communion of Saints," both relics of medieval days left standing intact in the Episcopal Churches of Scotland and of England, but further, the ritual goes out of its way to declare we shall obtain salvation through Christ only, thus hitting at the doctrine of the Intercession of the Saints, and even says that our salvation is by Faith alone.

Now this is just one of the particular points of cleavage between Protestantism and Catholicism, for the latter always has maintained the necessity of faith being proved by good works. Salvation by faith alone was one of the outstanding tenets of the Presbyterians, and shows clearly that the ritual in its present form is Presbyterian, and emphatically so.

Would men who were inventing a degree to foster the Jacobite cause go out of their way to insert phrases which must wound their hero, and many of his loyal supporters?

This aspect is further emphasized by the fact that among all the paraphernalia employed in the degrees there is neither cross nor crucifix, although we find them in other Masonic High Degrees. The omission must be deliberate, for from the nature of the ritual these emblems might well have been employed.

Against these facts, no word in the ritual of a pro-Jacobite nature can be adduced, and so I can see no reason for claiming these degrees were made up to help the Jacobites.

The degrees themselves are highly mystical, and take the candidate from the Master Mason stage, through the Old Testament, over the "Bridge," onto the second Temple, and finally trace Christ's life and death, and show that He is the L.W. .

There are clear traces of that outlook on life which is called "Rosicrucian," and so they are good argument for those who claim that Rosicrucianism did influence Freemasonry. Keeping strictly to the Royal Order, we find in it the root matter of many of our Higher Degrees, and it is possible that some of these have been elaborated out of incidents passed over briefly in the Royal Order rituals.

As some guide I will indicate references to ideas which were probably subsequently developed further, though it is but fair to add that the alternative also is possible, namely, that these degrees also already existed, and had contributed to the ritual of the Royal Order, instead of having simply evolved from them. These are Royal Arch, Mark, Red Cross of

Babylon - the latter very clearly - Templar and Rose Croix. In addition there are many sections entirely unrepresented elsewhere in Masonry.

The ritual works mainly by question and answer, as in the Craft lectures, but one significant ritual practice deserves particular mention. At certain times the Brn. travel the reverse way of the Sun. This is correct, for they are then supposed to be in the region of the D - d, and popular tradition has always taught that the ghosts of men go reverse of the Sun.

The Tower too is most significant, and calls to mind a somewhat similar building described in the Mystical and "Chimycal" Marriage of Christian Rosy Cross, translated by W. Bro. Waite.

The Sns. used in this degree are many in number, and every one is of great antiquity and can be found in various parts of the world associated with Heathen Gods and ancient Rites of Initiation. The actual Sn. of the Harodim is to be seen in the ancient Aztec manuscripts, and is shown in a scene on a vase found at Chama, Mexico. This scene clearly depicts a cand. being initiated into a Mexican Rite, and being taught the Sn.. The case is certainly not later than 1500 A.D. and was only dug up a few years ago . In India the Sn. of Harodim is associated with Vishnu the Preserver. In Ancient Egypt it is shown on a fresco from Thebes dated about 1500 B.C., fragments of which are in the British Museum. Numerous examples could be quoted from Medieval work in Europe, for example in the 17th century paneled room known as the "Audience Chamber of the Visconti-Venosta," which is now in the Engadine Museum at St. Moritz, to which we referred in the previous chapter. This room also shows examples of the Sn. attached to the Rosy Cross degree, and, in the corners of it are figures making the Drinking Sn. of the Royal Order of Scotland. These figures are arranged in pairs as if answering each other.

Perhaps, however, the most significant fact of all is that the ritual of the Hung Society in China, known also as the Triad Society, or the Society of Heaven and Earth, is almost precisely the same in its main incidents as the ceremonies of this Scotch Order.

The regalia of the Order is fairly elaborate. It consists of a Garter, star and two sashes, one red for the Harodim, and one green for the Rosy Cross, and an elaborate apron of white, edged with bands of red and green.

Each candidate receives . . . which is supposed to show his characteristic virtue, and which, as a rule, is spelt without any vowels.

This must suffice for the Royal Order, though it deserves far more space.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR AND KNIGHTS OF MALTA.

The Knights Templar carry on the tradition of the Medieval Order, and may be regarded as teaching the Christian life in action. How far there is any historical connection between the Masonic Order and their Medieval predecessors is a question on which Masonic students are at variance. The writer considers that a strong probability exists that there is a definite connection, and has given his reasons at considerable length in "Freemasonry and the Ancient Gods."

It is not proposed to go fully into this controversy in this book, since its purpose is to indicate, so far as is permissible, the meaning of the Degrees, rather than their history. Certain facts, however, deserve to be placed on record:

(1) That in England, and still more in Scotland, the Order, though nominally suppressed in 1307 et seq., did not suffer the merciless slaughter of its members which fell upon them in France. Moreover, owing to the fact that Scotland was in open revolt against Edward II., who was supposed to rule it, enforcement of the edicts against the Knights was quite impossible.

(2) That certain branches of the Order - e.g., in Spain and Portugal - unquestionably survived, merely adopting a new name.

(3) The Charter of Transmission claims to carry on the succession in France. That Charter now hangs in Mark Masons' Hall, and if it were generally accepted as genuine it would practically settle the matter. The fact that it anathematizes the Scotch Templars, if it is genuine, would indicate a separate organization of the survivors in Scotland, and therefore explain whence Scotch and English Templary derive.

(4) The undoubted fact that not only many Knights, but also the whole of the Templar Priests and lay Brothers, some of whom were Masons, were not even imprisoned, points to another possible line of descent.

Be that as it may, the Ritual worked to-day, though it has been revised several times in recent years, contains many curious features which would indicate considerable antiquity.

At Bristol a man may not take the Rose Croix unless he is a Templar, and this supports the theory of those who believe that originally the Rose Croix was the inner working of the Templars. The Royal Order of Scotland also shows clear indications of a connection with

Templary, both in the legend of its foundation and in the use of a certain word common to both Orders, and used in no other Degrees.

In view of the fact that the Royal Order has its Knightly Degree of the "Rosy Cross," these points are of special significance.

The Legend of the foundation of the Royal Order is that Bruce, after Bannockburn, created the Degree of the Rosy Cross so as to reward those Masons who had assisted him in the battle, and conferred on them the honour of Knighthood. Now we know that the Templar Knights, instead of surrendering themselves to Edward II. when he sent his commissioners into Scotland to arrest them, joined his enemy, Bruce.

Is it then not probable that Bruce, by the foundation of this new Order, thus rewarded these Templars and restored to them the Knighthood which by the abolition of the old Order had lapsed?

The Ritual as used to-day has undergone drastic revision recently. To give but one example, there appears no doubt that the altar in the East is a modern innovation, beautiful though it is. Formerly there was only a sepulchre, and there are still a few preceptories where the old Ritual is permitted. Even in the modern Ritual members will recollect that they took the O. at the sepulchre, which significantly is in the C., and not at the East.

This is a matter of great importance as we shall see in a moment. In Scotland the Degree is divided into Novice, Esquire, and Knight. In England there are still three points corresponding to these Medieval divisions, though the fact is rather slurred over. If we recollect (a) The Robe marks the Novice; (b) The Tunic marks the Esquire; (c) It is only the Knight who is invested with the Mantle; we shall perceive that the Ritual still bears witness to these three stages. The Cup of Remembrance in the U.S.A. is still drunk from an unusual receptacle, and is emphatically the Cup of Mystical Death.

The Ritual of the Knight Templar, as we know it to-day, has obviously an exoteric and an esoteric meaning. The exoteric lesson, and a very good lesson too, is that the Christian soldier must have ever before his eyes in his struggle with the world the precepts of the Master - Christ. He must be a good soldier of Christ outside the doors of Temple; he must uphold truth and justice, defend the weak, and set a fine example of chivalrous conduct in his daily life. In short, he must not only profess Christianity but really live it.

It will thus be seen that a candidate would need to be a Christian, even if he was not definitely called upon to defend the Christian faith - which he is. But within this sound practical lesson there lies a high mystical message. We are taught of the Lamb who was

mystically slain before the beginning of the world. We enter as a pilgrim striving to escape from the worldly spirit. We dedicate ourselves to Christ at the C., that is to say, in the hidden recesses of our souls.

In that hidden place our past life of sin lies dead, even as the earthly body of the Redeemer lay in the tomb. Therefore, on it we dedicate ourselves, finding that over our dead past rises, as it were, the figure of The Crucified.

Armed with the weapons of the Spirit we go forth on our spiritual journey, and after long and painful travels return victorious from our conflict with the spiritual foes of man. Note the symbolical three years, corresponding with the three years of Christ's life of ministry on Earth.

But after action must come penance and meditation, and above all we must meditate, not merely on physical death, but still more on that greater mystery, the mystical death; and being thus prepared, we must offer our sacrifice. Nay, more, we must be marked with the sign of His sacrifice, but in Christian mysticism we are taught that the true mystic must spiritually crucify himself, even as the Great Master physically suffered on the Cross, and this is the mystical death. Is that last incident in the life of the mystic forgotten in the Ritual of this great Order? Think it over, Brother Knights.

This is veiled language, and as far as is permissible, I have endeavored to indicate that Masonic Templary has a great mystical lesson. There are countless small points in the Ritual which support this view, but for obvious reasons I have omitted them, e.g., the gradual investiture of the candidate indicates the acquisition by degrees of certain spiritual qualities.

THE KNIGHTS OF MALTA.

If we regard the Knights Templar as one Degree we find that the Order has two, or possibly three Degrees in all. After the K.T. comes the Mediterranean Pass. It is now, practically, merely a passing Degree leading to the Malta, but it has a significance of its own. The sign, to begin with, is undoubtedly old. Major Sanderson found the same sign in use among the Yaos in Central Africa, and it was also known and venerated by the Arabs. In view of the tradition connecting the Mediterranean Pass and the Malta Degrees with the Arabs, this fact is obviously significant. Nor, esoterically, can we ignore the importance of the serpent in connection with a mystical journey, and in like manner "The Sea" is a phrase well known among mystics to imply certain spiritual facts, and is always said to lie beyond the mystical resurrection.

To make myself clear to non-mystical readers, let me add that mystical death and resurrection are well recognised stages in the development of the soul of the man who, while still in the body, is striving to reach spiritual union with God. St. Paul says that he died daily in Christ.

When we reach the Hall in which the degree of Malta is to be worked, we pass certain emblems which we are told indicate birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension. These are a symbolic summary of our whole Masonic career from the time we entered the Craft till the time we are finally made a Knight of Malta. Further, resurrection is a new birth which, in itself, presupposes a new life, and in the mystical world we must, like St. Paul, be prepared to die daily in Christ.

The Malta, then, is a Degree of mystical, not physical resurrection, and the fact is emphasized by the linking up of the symbolical acts with the true history of the old Knights of St. John of Malta. The symbols on the table should be studied with this key, particularly that of the galley which bore the souls to safety though it perished itself. Our body must one day die, but if we have lived aright it will bring our souls in safety to the "Islands of the Blest." This is true whether viewed mystically, or in regard to life in the world of action.

The Sns. used in this Degree are certainly old, and the Pen. most peculiar and significant. It could hardly have been invented in the 18th century. The Sn. in the Templar degree is shown in the room of the Visconti Venosta to which we have already referred, and in the same room are to be seen figures making the Sn. of the Knights of Malta.

The colour of the Templar robes are white with a red cross, i.e., the "Blood of the Lamb," in which we have washed and become thereby as white as snow. But those of Malta are black, with a white cross: out of the black night of the Soul, out of the darkness of mystical death, the cross of Salvation rises, no longer a cross of suffering, but one of resplendent glory.

CHAPTER IX. THE REMAINING DEGREES.

There still remains another Order of Christian Chivalry and its outstanding feature is that it is the only Order open to English masons which avowedly sets out to give a Christian interpretation of the Craft and Royal Arch. The degrees which constitute this Order are:-

- (a) The Knights of the Red Cross of Constantine, and
- (b) The Knights of St. John and the Holy Sepulchre.

Like the Knights Templar this Order has its Head Quarters at Mark Masons' Hall.

The Knights of the Red Cross of Constantine teach us the well-known story of how Constantine came to be converted, but the Lecture contains a most interesting reference to the Roman College of Architects, whom I personally regard as the direct ancestors of the Comacine Masons, from whom Freemasonry descends. I must admit, however, that I should require fairly strong evidence to convince me that Constantine himself was a member of one of the Collegia.

But in any case this degree is merely a stepping stone to the really great degree of the Knights of St. John and the Holy Sepulchre. This degree appears to have consisted once of three degrees and even now has at least three "points," in it, though these may be interpreted as corresponding to novice, esquire, and knight. The ceremonies are solemn, dramatic and of deep mystical significance, but their most striking feature is an attempt to explain the Craft and Royal Arch Ceremonies in a Christian sense.

While not prepared to admit that this is the only, or even the original inner meaning of these degrees, I do consider that the interpretation given is of a most interesting and instructive nature, and if we realize that all through the middle ages Freemasonry was avowedly Christian, and demanded of its members belief in the essential doctrines of the Church, we shall see that this interpretation is deserving of very great respect.

Since those desirous of obtaining this interpretation can do so by joining these degrees, no good purpose would be served in disclosing the points interpreted, beyond saying that the Architect of the Temple is identified with Christ, and the various incidents in the history of our hero are similarly interpreted in the light of the Christian story. The outstanding fact, however, is that here we are definitely told that our ceremonies have a secret inner meaning and this is the only degree in English Freemasonry, of which I am aware, which does endeavour to give the meaning of the Craft and Arch.

The degrees enumerated up to this point are all that can be called strictly masonic which are open to the average English Freemason, but there are several quasi-masonic Orders, or Societies as they are usually called, which for all practical purposes are masonic, since they require a masonic qualification, and like other masonic degrees work a ritual with special secrets. These we will now consider.

QUASI-MASONIC DEGREES.

The Secret Monitor which works under the Grand Conclave is one of the best known of these Societies, only Master Masons are admitted, and there are two degrees and a Chair

degree. Attached to it is the order of the Scarlet Cord, which has no less than seven degrees. The real object of the Secret Monitor is to strengthen the bonds of Brotherhood and enforce the principle that a Brother should, whenever possible, help another Brother. The Conclaves often do possess more warmth than the average London Lodge, but there is not much inner meaning in the ceremonies and no very valuable lessons will be learnt from them.

Of quite a different type is the Soc. Ros. in Anglia. This, like the Secret Monitor, admits none but Master Masons, and its rulers are eminent members of the Craft. There are nine degrees and the higher ones are said to be conferred only for merit. The Order always has a Lecture at each of its meetings on some abstruse subject. The Soc. Ros., as it is affectionately called by its members, claims to have the same objects as the Medieval Rosicrucians, and it seems probable that there is some historical connection. It is, however, not the only body which puts forth this claim, even in England, but these are in no sense Masonic.

The Soc. Ros. is also linked with the Illustrious Order of Light which works only at Bradford, at present, and with another Order. It is not so much that these orders are under the control of the Soc. Ros. as that the leading spirits in each are closely associated with the Soc. Ros. and that the members of the Orders are derived only from that Society.

CONCLUSION.

Thus it will be seen that practically all the degrees in Freemasonry have a definite lesson to teach, and an inner meaning to their ceremonies. Some, no doubt, are more important than others, degrees but the man who has never gone beyond the Craft has still much to learn. He has made no real effort to recover that which was lost, and therefore has signally failed to make a daily advancement in Masonic knowledge. If he has not time to take all the degrees, at least let him try to complete his second degree by taking the Mark, and obtain one answer to the question of what was lost, by taking his Royal Arch.

If he has done this, and has gone no further, let him still avoid saying "I don't think much of the Higher Degrees" Until he has taken them he is in no position to form any kind of opinion, and after he has done so I feel sure that he will no longer speak slightly of some of the greatest mysteries of this or any Age.