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The Royal Arch Degree

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The Address delivered by M E Comp S C Bingham at the opening of
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It cannot fail to be a matter of great satisfaction to all members of our fraternity that a new centre of Masonic activity, a new factor in the dissemination of light and knowledge, has been inaugurated in our Province, and I feel sure that I am giving expression to a common sentiment. When I express the hope for, and anticipate a future of much usefulness for the Chapter we are engaged in erecting.

Our ritual states that the Supreme Degree of the H R A is the summum bonum, the ne plus ultra, the completion and perfection of all preceding Freemasonry, whilst the English Ritual expressly disclaims any pretence as a further Degree, and is in agreement with the dictum of a well-known American Masonic writer, Mackay, who says the Royal Arch is the keystone of the Masonic edifice, being absolutely necessary to complete the Degree of a Master Mason, inasmuch as the latter cannot be properly understood without the development of the former. It is true that further fees are required, a new set of regulations are handed to our Candidates, a more stringent (if possible) Obligation is entered upon, and the convocations are entirely disassociated from the Craft, whilst the ordeal of the ballot has again to be faced. The reason for these seeming barriers to progress in Freemasonry may be given in very few words. A moment's thought will convince all here that many are admitted through the outer portals of Freemasonry who can but very imperfectly conform to our peculiar system of morality, do not appreciate the ethical lessons that we endeavour to convey, and to whom the declared objects of our fraternity - viz, - Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth - are little more than empty words. Personal gain and social advancement are their passwords. Let them never be permitted to be used as the shibboleth for entrance to our inner assemblies. Even if such in the slightest degree animated our minds when we first sought the light, let us with one accord heave over such vain and unbecoming thoughts amongst the rubbish outside the temple, and approach only with uplifted hands and bended knees as outward signs of that reverence and adoration which alone should characterise true servants of the Most High. As the Operative Masons of old kept cowans and intruders rigidly outside their assemblies, so should we seize every opportunity of closely guarding the precincts of our Chapter, and take care to admit none but those who, by their demeanour and bearing in the outer courts, have proved that they are indeed worthy of the full light of the knowledge of Freemasonry. Too much care cannot be taken in the practice of the beautiful series of ceremonies of the Supreme Degree which form a fitting conclusion to the gradual ascent made by Candidates for our mysteries, when as an Entered Apprentice they snake their first step up that symbolical ladder or winding staircase of Masonic knowledge, till they finally arrive at the White Veil, which is an emblem of the closing hours of our earthly existence.

We are familiar with the teachings peculiar to the Craft, but there is unfortunately far less opportunity of studying the especial lessons of this Supreme Degree. It is customary, therefore, on an important occasion like the present to devote a few moments to their consideration. To myself they seem to be humility, perseverance, and the inculcation of reverence to our Maker.

The three Sojourners, after a long and weary journey from Babylon, present themselves to the Sanhedrin desiring to be allowed to assist in the great and glorious work then proceeding in the land of their forefathers. The lateness of their application precludes them from appointment to the higher position which their rank seems to demand, but, although descendants of princes and rulers in Israel, they deemed the lowest service and honour. Their humility bespoke their merit. It may be interesting to you to know that an older version of our ritual identifies these Sojourners with S M A (this stand for Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego - refer in the V S L - Daniel Chapter 3 verses 12 to 30) who, as the V S L informs us, had already given proof of their steadfastness and faith by passing through the furnace.

The humility thus shown is a lesson which may fairly be recommended in these self-assertive days to us all alike. We are too apt to become in ourselves, through the frailty of our flesh, egotistical, selfish, and inconsiderate. We are here taught to be humble before God and our Brethren. Let us honour all men, and, whilst we should never forget that it is our duty to adhere to our principles at all hazards, and never abandon the straight but narrow path of duty, let us endeavour to be meek and self-restrained in our estimate of

ourselves, our position in life, or our talents, and be equally anxious to recognise merit and ability in others at all times and under all circumstances.

By these Sojourners we are also reminded of the virtue of perseverance. Like them, let us persevere to the end, working on faithfully in spite of every obstacle, just as did the patriotic Jews of old; so should we continuously labour on the building of our symbolical temple. We should never be weary, never give up, but work on until the Great Overseer summons us from toil to rest, from the measure of time to a measureless eternity.

Our Traditional History states that the persevering labours of the Sojourners resulted in two great discoveries, one being the restoration of that Great Light in every Degree of Freemasonry, the V S L, and the other the long-lost method of pronouncing the Sacred Word.

By the somewhat dramatic method of reception of Candidates adopted in our Chapters we endeavour to reveal to them a gleam of light from the Altar in the Centre, which, it unfolded to them in the right spirit, should permeate their minds with a deep sense of reverent acknowledgment of the infinite greatness and majesty of the The Almighty Lord God Most High. In the three Degrees of Craft Freemasonry we are symbolically engaged in erecting a temple to the honour and glory of the Most High. We liken our Candidate to the rough ashlar, with which the edifice is being constructed, hewn and shaped by the mallet and chisel of the E A, tried and proved by the Square, Plumb, and Level of the Craftsman, and finally passed by the Chief Overseer as fitted to form part of that eternal structure, that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Such is the underlying principle of the Craft. In the H R A we endeavour to carry the application still further. The Temple of King Solomon as well as the succeeding structure erected from the divinely inspired plans of the Prophet Ezekiel, containing an inner shrine wherein was deposited the Ark of the Covenant, the tablets of stone, and other articles held sacred by the Jews. Here was the Shekhinah, the visible manifestation of the Divine Power upon earth. Only the High Priest, one consecrated to the service of God and who had conformed to the strict regulations of the Hebrew law, was allowed to enter therein, where, on the great Day of Atonement, he uttered the Sacred Word in propitiation for the people's sins, whilst a clash of instruments outside prevented the utterance being overheard.

This occasion seems to have been the only one in which the name of God was ever pronounced, the substitute Adonai being used, even in the most solemn benedictions. We may regard the Companions of the H R A as symbolically erecting within the Temple of the Craftsman a shrine, a sanctum sanctorum, a Holy of Holies, where, in the dim light of reverential awe, each may humbly approach his Maker and plead for mercy. The White Veil symbolises for us that frail division that is between this life and that which is to come. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, it may be drawn aside, and we be summoned into the Divine Presence. May we then be able to offer a pure heart and contrite spirit as our password to the Grand Chapter above.

It has often been said that the great lesson of the Degree is reverence. At the risk of repeating myself, I would again endeavour to impress upon all that, as the essence of our teaching is founded on the name of the Most High, a reverential bearing is imperative in our convocations. Levity of any kind should be rigidly excluded, let us remember the oft-repeated instruction of the Installing Officer, that first impressions are the most permanent, for be assured, and I speak with some years experience, the measure of the success of your operations will be but the expression of the earnestness and thoroughness that you each put into your work. Not only learn your Ritual, but study it, understand it, thus and thus only will the material you receive fully appreciate your conscientiousness.

Be in no great hurry to add to your number. Quality will always count against quantity, and success must follow.

One of the chief functions of a Chapter is to draw together the best that is in the contributing Lodges, attaching all by a new end stronger chain of affection, uniting in the great object of adding lustre to our venerable institution. May the beams of light which shine forth from this Chapter radiate through the Lodges of the district, and if it be possible let your works of charity shine yet more brightly, your deeds of brotherly love be more constant, the interest in your neighbour's welfare, whether he be in or out of the Craft, be more sustained; let the right hand of fellowship be more promptly extended; in short, may the teachings of our

beloved Order be more genuinely felt and put into practice by the institution of this Chapter, so that faithful Sojourners and loving Companions we may at last, labour ended, building consummated, hope to be admitted through the Royal Arch of Divine mercy into the Presence of the King of Kings.

Companions you will, I doubt not, join heartily with me in saying S M I B.