

Development of R.A.M. Degrees

By SIR FREDERICK HALSEY

IN a recent address delivered in London, Sir Frederick Halsey, D. G. M. of England, and Grand Second Principal of the Grand Chapter, interestingly referred to the development of the Capitular degrees as follows:

« We tell our Exaltees that they are not to consider that they have received a Fourth Degree in Freemasonry, but that they have only completed the Third. When we look out on Freemasonry of the present day we see that there are a great number of Masonic degrees practiced - outside degrees, as we sometimes term them.

« The Royal Arch differs from them in being recognized by the United Grand Lodge of England. But at one time the Royal Arch was the Fourth Degree in Freemasonry, and the number four still recurs in the ceremony. The Third Degree and the Royal Arch are, however, intimately connected. Two hundred and six years ago, when the Grand Lodge was formed, I think I am correct in saying that neither of them had any existence as distinct ceremonies.

« The square, the level, the plumb rule, themselves, which are the tools of a F. C. are also the jewels worn by the W. M. and his wardens, and seem to suggest to us that the Second Degree was at one time the highest in Freemasonry - and Masonic history confirms this.

« It was not until some time after the Grand Lodge of England was formed in 1717, that we find the least trace of the Third or M. M.'s Degree. And not a few lodges in Scotland refused for forty years after their Grand Lodge was formed to have anything to do with the Third Degree. You may trace the spread of the Third Degree in the minutes of the lodges in Scotland.

« France, on the other hand, after its Grand Lodge was formed, accepted the Third Degree at once, and proceeded further. The idea of higher degrees for the aristocrats of France was developed. About 1740 certain Excellent Masters, as we may call them, who wore sprigs of acacia on their aprons, took upon themselves the duty of inspecting the lodges to see that the work was correctly done and free from abuses.

« This was the seed from which the various higher degrees were developed and confusing the two French words *accessois* and *ecossais*, this development was fathered on to Scotland, which, as a matter of fact knew nothing about these degree, and when they did, objected strongly to them.

« The Scottish Knight became the Fourth Degree, the Knight of the Eagle, the Fifth; the Knight Templar, the Sixth; and the Sublime Illustrious Knight, the Seventh. The Second Knight's Degree was founded on the tradition that three Scottish Crusaders while they were in the Holy Land, and that during their researches they had to hold a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other to ward off the Saracens.

« This I take to be the basis of our Royal Arch ceremony. I cannot here trace the many developments which followed in France, and later, in America. Those who belong to the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Thirty-three Degrees will know how the Master Mason's Degree was eventually divided into ten degrees.

« The idea, however, of the Royal Arch as a completion of the Third Degree proved popular. England had then three Sovereign Grand Lodges: the Modern Grand Lodge of 1717; the Ancient

Grand Lodge of 1751; and the Old York Lodge, which for some years claimed jurisdiction in the north of England.

« Each of these Grand Lodges allowed Royal Arch Chapters to be formed between the years 1750 and 1770, and they were eventually attached to Craft Lodges. After 1770 the 'Ancients' and the 'Moderns' both formed Grand Chapters. In 1817 these two Grand Chapters were taken under the wing of the Craft and all the higher degrees were left severally alone.

« The Grand Lodge of Scotland, which with great caution accepted the Third Degree, has never, I believe, recognized the Royal Arch. That degree and others are granted under the jurisdiction of the Grand Chapter of Scotland, which has not that intimate connection with Grand Lodge which we find in England and Germany, after twenty-five years of higher degrees in the eighteenth century, reverted to the three Craft degrees only. Two attempts were made to introduce the Royal Arch, but without success.

« What, then, shall we say, are the purposes of Royal Arch Masonry? We may look at the matter in this way: The Third Degree leaves us with a mysterious veil over the prospect of futurity. The Royal Arch lifts that veil and brings us face to face with eternal realities, the throne of the Great I Am, and assures that there is indeed an eternal life beyond the grave, where we shall get to know the Mysterious Name of the True and Living God Most High.

« The Royal Arch, therefore, is the completion of the Third Degree, which deals with death. As far as I can see, it includes all the essential teachings which are the subject of the higher degrees. It is that which calls itself, the Supreme Degree in Freemasonry. »