

## MASONIC DEGREES

(With particular reference to the Royal Arch)

By Charles W. Lilley, PGM,  
Grand Recorder,  
The Grand Council Royal And Select Masters of Western Canada.  
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Originally there was but one ceremony. The instruction was the way to build. When 'modern' Speculative Free Masonry was introduced, the tools and materials of the builders' art were taken to illustrate moral principles. These, with the teaching of the Sacred Scriptures, were used as symbols to impart the knowledge of how to build character.

The most important part of Free Masonry is not in ceremonials, lectures or degrees, but in that which takes place before the candidate is admitted or entered.

The Operative Entered Apprentice had to be physically fit to perform the labour, mentally capable of acquiring knowledge, and morally worthy of being admitted to the Master Workman's household. These are also the essentials of a Speculative Entered Apprentice. Without these qualifications the material for the moral structure is not accepted nor can it be used without the foundation principles of Faith in the actual existence of the Supreme Being. Without this foundation the building would not be secure, and without this Faith, the Charters for Masonic Lodges should be surrendered at once.

Symbolic teaching in Masonic Craft degrees follows the methods of the primitive church, in which there were three classes: "**Catechumens**," "**Discipline**" and "**Illuminati**" following "**Baptism**," "**Discipline**" and the "**Eucharist**" symbolic of "**Incarnation**," "**Crucifixion**" and "**Resurrection**." These are the Christian Mysteries which Modern Speculative Free Masonry symbolizes in the Craft Degrees.

The First and Second Degrees were introduced about 1720. By whom they were formulated is not known, but they were conferred in London at that Time.

The first reaches Fear, Dependence, Obedience, Worship, Fidelity, Charity, Secrecy, Brotherly Love, and Pure Character.

The second imparts the knowledge of the five senses; the use of the faculties in the arts and sciences; the values of symmetry and order in the different orders of architecture, symbolizing the beauties of a good life, reverence and admiration of the glorious works of the Divine Architect, and Sabbath observance.

The third was introduced about 1725. No one knows who arranged it or exactly where it was first conferred. It seems to begin with the Bible story of the fall of man, when the promise was given that, though the Serpent should bite the heel of the good, the good would bruise the head of the evil; or in the story of the mythical Gods of Egypt: Osiris, Isis and Typhon, wherein Typhon murders his brother Osiris, and Isis finds the body of her husband and restores him to life. These have counterparts in the searching of the Scandinavians for the

corpse of Baldur the Good; in the legend of Hiram the Builder; and in the searching of Mary for the body of the Lord. The old story of the race always losing and finding, and the final conquest of the veil of the good.

The picture is illustrative of a well-spent life and a reward for fidelity and ends Craft Symbolism, the only ceremonial in the jurisdiction of Grand Lodges.

The Royal Arch system is recognized by Craft Masons as a part of Masonic Symbolism. It is called Capitular Free Masonry, and its assemblies designated as “**Chapters.**” In England it has three degrees and in the United States, four. Its’ origin is unknown.

The oldest record of the Royal Arch being conferred is an account of them being worked at York and Dublin in 1740; at York under the Grand Lodge of All England, and at Dublin in a Lodge chartered by Mother Kilwinning. They were conferred in London under the Grand Lodge of Ancients organized in 1751, and Lodges under the Jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of the Moderns in 1765; in Virginia in 1753; Philadelphia in 1767; Boston in 1769 and at Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1782.

In 1768 the title “**Chapter**” was first used and Grand Chapters were organized.

The symbolism of the Holy Royal Arch is as old as the earliest civilization. In their search for truth, the Triangle and the Triple Triangle is found to have been used as symbols of Divine Principles before the Hebrew people occupied Palestine. The number three pervades everything in Nature: - air, earth and water; father, mother and child. Wherever man observed his surroundings there were three principles, and his mythical Gods were three. The story of Trinity in Unity is found in every religion under the sun. “Three in One” makes the Cross which is the symbol of the First Cause, and the key to the mysteries of India and Egypt and carried down through the ages in our civilization as the sign of immortality.

The Cabalistic or Hebrew Sacred Name, though never lost, was hidden from the profane and only deciphered by him who finds the key to it.

In the Mark Masters’ Degree, the Candidate is a Fellow Craft, who, after serving his apprenticeship, has worked in foreign countries for a year learning how to adorn and embellish his product. He finds a piece of work in an unlikely place and presents it demanding wages, but the stone bears no mark and is of peculiar shape. It is therefore rejected. But after a time it is found again, and proclaimed to the Chief Corner Stone, on which the newly instructed workman, after choosing it, places a Mark. Later in the systems the stone is found to be the keystone of the Arch binding the structure together, and without which the building would be insecure.

The teaching is obvious. However perfect and beautiful the character, without Faith in the Divine, and the hope of immortality, the human character is wanting of the great essentials. That often the rarest jewels are found in the rubbish, and what, at first, seems worthless may later be found of great value. The Mark, designated a name, symbolic of the new name, “*I will give him a white stone with a new name written thereon.*”

The Most Excellent Master's Degree is universally practiced in Chapters. Its origin is not known. It was worked in the Irish systems in 1769, and in St. Andrew's Chapter, Boston, Mass. in that year.

The Candidate represents one of the Master Builders who, according to legend, took part in the completion of Solomon's Temple and places the keystone in the principle arch. When the tools are laid down, the work being finished and the Sabbath or rest declared with a period of great rejoicing and devotion, the Ark of the Jewish Covenant made by Moses when he erected the Tabernacle in the Wilderness, and of eventful history, is safely seated. The teaching is obedience to one God, Jehovah; praise for His goodness, and worship of the Holy Name.

The sublime degree of the Holy Royal Arch completes the system. It symbolizes the finding of the lost in the liberating of the Hebrews from the Egyptian and Babylonian captivities; the destruction of Solomon's Temple and erection of a temple on the original site by Zerubabel 500 years afterward; the search for the finding of the key to the sacred name which was written in Chaldaic, Assyrian, Egyptian and Hebrew characters; teaching that every nation revered and worshipped the Father of All.

This completes Masonic Symbolism as illustrated in the Craft and Capitular Degrees, the study of which is worthy of all the time and thought one can spare from his daily avocations, and contains all the essentials to be found in all the so-called 'higher degrees.'