

THE CRYPTIC RITE

The Capstone of Ancient Craft Masonry

Companions of the Grand Council of Louisiana:

I desire to acknowledge to you my grateful appreciation of your most cordial and hospitable reception - You have placed me under lasting obligations.

I esteem it an additional privilege to address you because of your interest and active engagement in the promotion of the glorious cause of Freemasonry, especially of the Cryptic Rite.

As General Grand Master, I am seeking, as best I may, to develop an interest in, and broaden the influence of, the Cryptic Rite. My message should appeal to Lodge, Chapter and Council members alike, because the possession of the degrees practiced in Lodge, Chapter and Council is necessary to the making of a perfect Ancient Craft Mason. Thus, my only desire and hope is that I may somehow bring a message that will broaden your Masonic information, lend a bit of encouragement, instill a little leaven of enthusiasm and create a measure of determination, that will react for good to Cryptic Masonry in this jurisdiction.

I am attached especially to Cryptic Masonry because I see in it an agency for the cultivation of those higher virtues and aspirations which distinguish the good man from the bad. I see in it an agency that leads us upward to that lofty standard of manhood for which all good men strive; an agency that teaches us that we must journey through the gates of death before we can obtain our eternal reward, and not then unless we have been faithful and true.

Speaking generally, the basic elements upon which we have built our Masonic institution in the past still remain the sure foundation for the future. We are agreed that Freemasonry is one of the most stabilizing influences we have in the world. Its spiritual values are incomparable. It has wrought wonderfully for the betterment of mankind. Its influence has helped to shape your life, and the higher life of your community and state.

Our Fraternity rests upon the basic idea of a belief in God and the immortality of the soul, and you, as individuals, also rest upon that basic idea, and take comfort in it. Our Masonry has come down to us a cherished heritage from the past. The Holy Bible lies open upon the altar before us and from it we receive our faith and gather our inspiration, and from it comes the divine command to glorify God and to serve our fellowmen.

Before dealing directly with our ideals and hidden mysteries, please let us reflect briefly upon present conditions. Present conditions in our Fraternity are not all that we could wish, but they are such as we might reasonably expect. Is there any other organization or group of men associated for commendable purposes which has not been affected as much or more than ours? We possess every requirement for progress that we had a few years ago. Surely our purposes and our standards have not changed and our members are just as able and loyal and willing to do their share of the work as they ever have been. This is not a time for abandoning our time-honored traditions and principles. The perpetuity of our institution ever has rested and will continue to rest upon the cooperation and loyalty of our members, to which never-failing devotion we trust every brother and companion here present, in all sincerity, is eternally pledged.

In solving the problem before us we need more intelligent, more enthusiastic, more consecrated leadership; we need likewise faithful, earnest, devoted followers. All must work together; the leader without followers can do nothing of himself. Let us, individually, and as local units, re-consecrate ourselves to Masonic service, until the Daystar once more arises in our midst to banish the night of depression. Let us appreciate what we have and quit moaning for what we do not have, and ere long the dawn will break.

What a call, my brethren and companions, to give our fullest loyalty and allegiance. Let us cling to our Masonic heritage and stand steadfast in support of our time-honored institution, and we, and it, will prevail.

What a wonderful Order is this of ours! What a blessing it has been to humanity! How proud we should be to be among its votaries!

There is no remedy for us except to gird our loins and WORK, ever remembering that there must be united, concentrated and persistent labor on the part of every member, if there is to be life and vigor for the future. But above all things, let not your hearts be cast down or unduly troubled. Put on the Armor of Determination, of Enthusiasm, and Loyalty, and we shall ere long emerge triumphant.

So much for present conditions and the problems before us. Now let us turn to the treasures that lie hidden for you in the Cryptic Rite.

Volumes have been written on the symbolism and philosophy of Lodge, Chapter and Commandery. For some cause the Cryptic Rite has been sorely neglected. Aside from the recent "History of the Cryptic Rite", prepared under authority of the General Grand Council; "The Annals of the Cryptic Rite" by Dr. Frank W. Hendley, P.G.M. of Ohio; the "Review of Cryptic History in the United States" by George W. Warvelle, P.G.M. of Illinois, at Galesburg, in 1895; the Oration of R. Perry Bush of Massachusetts before the General Grand Council at Baltimore in 1918; the illuminating Address of our present Deputy General Grand Master, Nelson Williams, of Ohio, before the General Grand Council at Tacoma, in 1930, there are few extended sources of information. It is not for me to explain, if I could, why this fertile field of ours has been so neglected. Surely we have overlooked great opportunities to spread the gospel of the Cryptic Rite and thereby secure greater accessions to its membership. You and I, and all the rest of us, have been content to let the Council drift, to gather what it could by natural accretion, as it were, as it floated along.

You well know that, as Blue Lodge Masons, you did not receive that for which you sought, but were held in abeyance with a "substitute" and a promise of greater light in the future "when future ages should find out the right." Thousands of Masons today are without that Word, that light they so much need, because they have not been prevailed upon to enter the Chapter. And, in like manner, there are thousands of Chapter Masons, who are acquainted with the Discovery of the Word, but who are still ignorant of HOW that discovery was made possible, because they have not been induced to enter and be instructed in the unfolding of that Great Mystery in the Council. In the Council, the Chapter degrees are fully rounded out and given a perfect finish, for the Temple of Ancient Craft Masonry is not fully completed until the Capstone of the Cryptic Rite is found, brought to light, and symbolically placed in the Sanctuary.

If we will but lift our eyes, we will see that the field of our activity is ripe unto the harvest. It is for us to educate the brother and companion ascending the Masonic ladder that further light in Masonry may be had, and that he needs it, and to assure him that there will be unfolded before his eyes in the Council newer beauties in the history, philosophy and symbolism of Masonry. If he can be led to give thoughtful care to his Masonic education, he will find that each forward step will widen his vision and that the symbolic panorama will become richer and fuller, for the extended fields of Masonic travel are limited only by the opportunities afforded him, and his capabilities to master them.

Master Masons and Royal Arch Masons have advanced, indeed, only over the threshold in their aspirations; they are still searching the foundations of the Craft, and one portion of that great structure still remains in darkness. They have been invested with only a partial knowledge concerning the loss and recovery of those vital secrets of our Craft. As yet, they are not familiar with those impressive ceremonies with which those great secrets were put away,

until time and circumstance should reveal them. This part of their Masonic education, which completes the Circle of Perfection in Ancient Craft Masonry, is the function of the Council degrees. We should impress this fact upon every Royal Arch Mason and thus lead him to seek this additional light.

The historical setting of the Royal Master degree is just before the completion of the Temple and chronologically precedes the degree of Master Mason. The chief personages therein are our three Ancient Grand Masters, and a Fellowcraft in search of that reward which was to elevate him to the rank of a Master Mason. Thus, the seeker for more light, more Masonic knowledge, will find in the Royal Master degree the answer to the startling assertion of our Grand Master that the Word was lost in the death of Grand Master Hiram. This degree, therefore, contains most valuable information necessary to understand correctly all the preceding degrees. It also presents one great Masonic idea, beautifully symbolized, that of a laborer seeking his reward.

The Select Master degree is the most interesting degree in Ancient Craft Masonry, without a knowledge of which the history of the Royal Arch degree is not complete; for it rationally accounts for the concealment and preservation of those essential secrets which were buried in darkness for a period of 470 years from the Masonic eye, but brought to light at the building of the Second Temple; and a knowledge of these essentials is also necessary to comprehend clearly all the preceding degrees and thus complete the Circle of Masonic science.

The learned authors of "The History of the Cryptic Rite" have happily summed up the matter in these words: "The historical setting of the Select Master degree and its symbolism are intimately connected with the Royal Arch. It is the symbolical chain that binds the Master degree to the Royal Arch, and without it the mysteries and unsolved riddle of the Recovery remains in darkness. It is the great historical and symbolic bridge that spans the Golden Age of the Hebrew nation and the sad days of its captivity--from the completion of the First Temple to the building of the Second Temple. Truth seemed lost, yet it was not lost, but only hidden, until that generation should come, which by its perfection and unselfish labors would restore it and bring to light the ineffable secret to guide men in the paths of perfect peace, into the seat of the Holy of Holies."

There are many missing links in the great chain of Masonic history and symbolism, which are found only in the Royal and Select Master degrees, and the work of both Lodge and Chapter is incomplete without the degrees of the Council, for the Council adds the Capstone, the finishing touch, to the Masonic edifice. We miss a marvelous opportunity if we fail to impress this fact upon the Masonic neophyte.

The whole structure of Ancient Craft Masonry embracing Lodge, Chapter and Council, shows mutual dependence and interconnected unity. From the first degree of Entered Apprentice to the last degree of Select Master, each degree is linked to the others. The degree of Select Master, in its history and lectures, makes clear and intelligible everything appertaining to the Solomonian Temple. There the mysteries of the Royal Arch, the incommunicable Word, the Book of the Law, the Pot of Manna, the Budding Rod, are all fully elucidated and explained, so that now light shineth in the darkness of the Royal Arch. Therefore, we are not straining at truth when we declare that the Cryptic Rite is the Capstone of Ancient Craft Masonry, wherein the great Arch of the Masonic Temple is finished and the Circle of Perfection is fully completed.

There is another degree in the Council curriculum, that of Super-Excellent Master, wherein we see the Temple destroyed, the Jewish people and the furniture of the Temple (except only the Ark) carried into captivity, and witness the punishment visited

upon the faithless King Zedekiah. This degree is required of the subordinates of General Grand Council and is obligatory also in quite a number of our jurisdictions. It bridges the gap between the Select Master degree and the Royal Arch, and dramatically emphasizes several great Masonic tenets. While it has no historical connection with the Royal and Select Master degrees, the lessons of Faith, Friendship and Fidelity taught in that degree appeal very strongly to the hearts of men, and these lessons could hardly be more strongly emphasized than they are in our present ritual.

Dr. Frank W. Hendley, P. G. M. of Ohio, says that "The Cryptic degrees are particularly conspicuous in their support through their ritualisms and symbolisms, of the fundamental truth that it is through the gates of death, that we gain admission to the place of wages, refreshment and rest, and that by the practice of industry, faith and fidelity, we may so accomplish our work as to gain a certain and positive reward." All very true.

Our Cryptic degrees present a special appeal to studious, serious-minded Freemasons, who earnestly desire to attain full knowledge of the true ideals and purposes of the Institution. It has been said that no man can be a Master of Masonry in fact and in truth until he is in possession of the degrees of the Cryptic Council, and Companion J. Ross Robertson, of Canada, expressed it well, when he said, "The keystone of Royal Arch Masonry cannot be firmly cemented without the aid of the Cryptic trowel."

What a wonderful panorama of sacred literature, historical and traditional, is embraced in all these degrees of Ancient Craft Masonry, from Blue Lodge to Cryptic Rite, inclusive. And what comprehensive moral teachings do we find pictured there for our Masonic edification and enlightenment.

How incomplete would be the entire Masonic edifice without the Cryptic Rite, a wondrous capstone set in place to finish, to perfect, to adorn, to glorify the Temple, until now unfinished, a tale only partly told.

Cryptic Masonry, if properly understood and appreciated, is second to none of the various grades of Masonry. Aside from the power and beauty of its ritual, Royal Arch Masonry without it is incomplete. Supplementing and completing the "substitution ceremonies of the Lodge" and the mysteries of the Royal Arch, they afford the aspirant for further honors a sure vantage ground, and even though no further step be taken along the cabalistic pathway, here is found the summing-up of the ancient mysteries which can not fail to demonstrate the inevitable advancement of truth. Here we are taught to consider the means by which the real treasures of life are preserved through all the conflicts and convulsions of time.

While Freemasonry at large is intended to develop faith in the sure rewards of virtue and truth, the Cryptic Rite is peculiarly adapted to reveal the hidden hand that, amidst all life's vicissitudes, is safely holding the treasures which every true heart most sacredly reveres.

Therefore, I conceive it to be to the interest of every Lodge and Chapter Mason to continue his ascent up the symbolic ladder into full fellowship with his companions of the Cryptic Rite, and that you and they hold fast to its teachings, and some day within the ninth arch above all mysteries shall be wiped away and we shall bask in the light of truth forever.

We have merely scratched the surface of this amazing Masonic story. Beneath us lies a great mine, a secret vault of history, tradition and symbolism, well worth our most intelligent labor. Companions, it is for you to work this mine to the limit of your capacity--and may the God of our Fathers be with you in this royal and select endeavor.