A SHORT HISTORY OF THE ROYAL ARCH DEGREES.

Adapted by M. Ex. Comp. Norman McEvoy (Past Grand First Principal of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of British Columbia & Yukon (2012) from an address given by M. Ex. Comp Bauer, First Grand Principal, (Jurisdiction unknown)
On his visit to the Chapters in the Territory of Papua & New Guinea
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I realise that to some of you this may be a "*twice told tale*," but nevertheless I feel that something like this is needed from time to time, to help keep up an active interest in the Order. The history of Masonry, like its Degrees, has undergone a gradual growth through the years that have passed, which leaves much to be desired when we come to unravel the tangled skein.

Some of the histories which have been published, and unfortunately sold to the Brethren and Companions, have been more noteworthy for the credulity of their authors, than for their accuracy. Later investigations have brought to light many facts not known to the writers of these histories, and have shed light upon matters hitherto regarded as final.

I wish to try, if possible, to give a better idea of some matters connected with the history and purpose of the Royal Arch Degrees.
From the very nature of my subject it will be impossible for me to claim any originality for my facts, and very little for the method of their development.
It is probably true that, prior to the development of the Grand Lodge system, Masonry was purely operative in character and had but one Degree, that of the Entered Apprentice. All other distinctions were of rank only, and we know that that condition prevailed for a while after Speculative Masonry was established by the formation of the Grand Lodge of London in 1717.
Gould says

"All our latest historians are practically unanimous, that Freemasonry, as it emerged from the crucible in 1723, was the product of many evolutionary changes, consummated for the most part in six years during which the Craft had been ruled by a central authority."

In thus speaking we understand that he refers to the changes made by the Grand Lodge of London. Mackey says,

"It is the opinion of the best scholars that the division of the Masonic system into Degrees was the work of the revivalists of the beginning of the eighteenth

century; that before that period there was but one Degree, or rather one common platform of ritualism; and that the division into Masters, Fellows and Apprentices was simply a division of ranks, there being but one initiation for all. In the thirteenth regulation of 1720, approved in 1721, the orders of the Degrees of Master and Fellowcraft, are recognised in the following words: "Apprentices must be admitted Masters and Fellowcrafts only in Grand Lodge." Between that period and 1738, the system of Degrees had been perfected."

The division of the Masonic system into three Degrees must have grown up between 1717 and 1730, but in so gradual and imperceptible a manner that we are unable to fix the precise date of the introduction of each Degree. But the second and third were not perfected for many years.
Even as late as 1735 the Entered Apprentice Degree continued the most important form of initiation and he who has an Entered Apprentice was, for all practical purposes, a Freemason. It was not until repeated improvements, by the adoption of new ceremonies, and new regulations, that the Degree of Master Mason took the place which is now occupies; have been confined at first to those who had passed the Chairs.

Quoting from Mackey again we find the following:

*"As late as the year 1758 the Constitutional Lodge had no Royal Arch Degree, for in that year the Grand Secretary declared that: "Our Society is neither Royal Arch, nor Antient", and in the lecture of the Third Degree prepared by Anderson and Desaguilers it is said, "**That which is lost is now found,"** meaning, says Oliver, that the Masters Word was delivered to the newly raised Master Mason in the later ceremonies of the Third Degree, which would preclude the necessity for a Royal Arch Degree."*

It was not until 1766 that the Master's Word was finally severed from the Third Degree. In this connection it might as well be said that Gould accepts the statement of Oliver, that he found the true Word in an old Master's Chart in Ireland, which was dated 1725, which may be added to the proof of the Master's Word having been in use at an early date, and it is probable that, up to 1740, the essential part of the Royal Arch Degree constituted a part of the Master's Degree, and of course was communicated in later ceremonies.

Just where the Royal Arch Degree came from does not seem to be clear, but Gould seems to think that it came into being as a result of Chevalier Ramsey's attempt to introduce his so called 'Scot's Degrees in the system of Degrees adopted by the Grand Lodge of London. While he did not succeed in getting them to adopt his system yet he must have divulged his Degrees to them, at least

in part, and Gould seems to think that in all probability the idea of a separate Degree arose from the circumstance.

However it is quite certain that Chevalier Ramsey's Degree was entirely different from that adopted by the Brethren in England. In England, Scotland and the United States the circumstances on which the Degree is founded is the same, although there are differences in the way that the ceremonies themselves are constructed.

The true symbolism of the Royal Arch is founded on the discovery of the Lost Word, and while the legend or the historical bases may differ in the different rites, yet in all of them, the symbolic significance of the Royal Arch Degree is the same, and although the building of the Second Temple, is so prominently featured in our rites, yet this is not so on the Continent of Europe, and in Ireland the legend is founded upon events recorded in the Second Book of Chronicles (XXXIV,14) where Hilkiah is said to have found a Book of the Law as given to Moses.

The great object of Masonic research, as taught in its ceremonies and symbolism, is *Truth* and the neophyte upon receiving his Master Mason Degree is apt to feel that he has been defrauded when put off with a substitute Word. That this *Truth* is not that of science or of history, is evident to the thinking man, but the more important truth, is becoming aware of the knowledge and nature of God.

Science deals especially with the material world with the laws which govern the same, and has little to do with the first Great Cause, while history attempts to give us the course of past events whether they be of a material character or deal with man's origin and destiny on earth. These are truths of the earth, while the truths sought by Masonry have to deal with the eternal cause of all things, in perspective with the great Author of the Universe.

This great Truth, so earnestly sought by all true Masons, has been hidden from mortals for untold ages, and it is no wonder that it is represented as lost to men. Gould thinks that in the beginning, the Royal Arch Degree was given as a side Degree, and was as yet unrecognised by the governing bodies of York.

However, we know that the Degree was given only to those who had passed the chairs. A few years later Dermott condemned the practice, which had risen among the Brethren, of ***passing*** members through the chair in order that they might take the Royal Arch Degree.

In Scotland, a Lodge under the title of "Royal Arch" located at Glasgow was erected by the Grand Lodge of August 6th 1755, which seems to indicate that the Degree had penetrated from London into North Britain and Scotland.
The Degree seems also to have penetrated America in like manner, for we learn that the "Antients," in the year 1758, established a Lodge there with a similar name.

That the Degree was at first given under the auspices of a Master Mason's Lodge is certain, and that it was not until later that the Degree was separated from the Lodge, is equally true.
The earliest records of the Royal Arch, according to Gould, are to be found among the records of the York Body in England, and the next in point of date are those of the body which afterwards became the Grand Chapter, which seems to have been merely tolerated rather than recognised by the Grand Lodge of London.
While many of the leaders of the Craft became Royal Arch Masons, yet the Degree was not officially recognised except among the "Antients" until the union of the two old Grand Lodges in 1813.
It had been resolved in the Premier Grand Lodge of London, in November 1792 "*that the Grand Lodge of England has nothing to do with the proceedings of the Society of Royal Arch Masons."*

It is also evident that there existed in 1813, two bodies of Royal Arch Masons, because they formally united in 1817 under the name of "The United Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of England."

It is now generally understood, by Royal Arch Masons at least, that the Royal Arch Degree is a necessary supplement to the Master Mason's Degree, and enables the Mason to become complete in "*pure Antient Masonry*."

Although much of the history of the origin of Royal Arch Masonry is a matter for conjecture owing to the absence of written records, this much remains clear, that today, we have a system of ceremonies, which have undergone a series of development and growth unprecedented in the history of Masonic organisations, and which is well worthy of our earnest study.
They are full of sublime teachings, which, if heeded, will help to give mankind a better understanding of the great moral obligations which rest upon us as neighbours and brethren. They teach us the great truth that we are weak when working alone, and that we gain strength only by association, and with the help of the God of our Fathers.
The wisdom of the ages has gone into the making of the Masonic institution what it is today, and its roots lie hidden under the accumulation of the wreckage of centuries.

Here and there we may catch glimpses of those rootlets, like threads of gold shimmering in the Light.