MASONIC TRADITION AND THE ROYAL ARCH

Part 2 of 2

E. A. WAITE

But after nearly five hundred years - I am speaking still within the hypothesis of the symbolism - there rose up the Grand or Royal Lodge, which was in the day of restoration and the day when things are reborn, or made anew, when Zerubbabel, the prince of the people, with their prophet and priest, led back Israel out of exile. It came about that, having made a great discovery within the precincts of the First Temple, they held their Lodge at Jerusalem, and proclaimed the glad tidings, which are called the climax of Freemasonry - at least within the measures and under the obedience of the Old Law. And the original of that which we term the ROYAL ARCH is the Grand or Royal Lodge. In the sense of this symbolism, notwithstanding all disparities occasioned by things that are left at a loose end and all temporal lacunae, it may be said that the Holy Order does, within its own degree, complete the Masonic circle - though only within measures of the Craft - in virtue of that mystical recovery which made the glory of the Third Grand Lodge even as the glory of the first, and Jerusalem in the days of Zerubbabel as Horeb in those of Moses, who first promulgated the beneficent Law of Masonry.

The ROYAL ARCH may be defined briefly as the Grade of the Word attained; but while a certain expectation is intimated on the part of those who ruled, there is nothing to show that the Brethren who made the discovery were qualified by antecedent knowledge or were themselves dedicated to the work of quest. It was the providence of an accidental happening which brought about the event, and as such - on the surface - it does little honour to the important subject in hand. The discovery itself is unintelligible, as the story stands, since there is nothing leading up thereto - either in the Craft or Arch. But in Masonic Grades external to both the preliminary steps are found and the motive at work throughout. In view of this fact, as explained already, it would look as though the ROYAL ARCH had been lifted out of some Ritual series and utilized as an epilogue to the Craft, not a little to its own detriment, because it was never intended originally to stand alone. In Masonic history we hear of the bare title and of some undescribed symbol belonging thereto being carried in a Masonic procession, tempus 1743, while a year later there is an allusion to the Grade itself, but under circumstances which suggest that more than one version was about. The preliminary sidesteps or intermediates to which I have alluded and which throw light on the subject are not in distinct evidence till a later

period. If I may put forward a personal opinion, purely at its hypothetical value, it seems to me that as the ROYAL ARCH originated in these islands, certainly and beyond question, so also there were other Grades, side-steps or preliminaries connected therewith and essential thereunto. It is impossible to speculate about their original form, in the absence of all evidence, or on how far they have departed from it in the Degrees now extant: if we may judge by the vicious editing of the Arch Degree itself, they have suffered drastic change. The Grades in question are called respectively ROYAL and SELECT MASTER. But before offering a brief description of their scope and motive I must refer to the year 1754, when several important items were grouped together under the auspices of a French Rite, as if they had been manufactured suddenly or suddenly collected together. I refer to the COUNCIL OF EMPERORS OF THE EAST AND WEST, otherwise the RITE OF HEREDOM or RITE OF PERFECTION, working twenty-two Grades superposed on those of the Craft. In virtue of certain sub-titles attached to some of them on the authority of rare MSS. now in my hands, it would appear that not all of them were of French Origin, though it is impossible to have any assurance on such a debateable point. The examples include ENGLISH MASTER, as alter native to INTIMATE SECRETARY, and ILLUSTRIOUS IRISH MASTER, as substitute for PROVOST AND JUDGE. However this may be, we are concerned more especially with the thirteenth Grade of the Rite, called ROYAL ARCH OF ENOCH, or - in early examples - Knight of the ROYAL ARCH. As there are two titles, so also there are two forms and that which is the more important is, I think, perhaps the later: it is incorporated at the present day into the long series of the SCOTTISH RITE. It goes very near to the root-hypothesis of the Secret Tradition and delineates the circumstances under which the Sacred Word was placed in the hiddenness, long prior to the Three Prototypical Grand Lodges. In this form, I believe, it to be of foreign invention as well as redaction: its importance for our purpose is that it places a Masonic complexion on an early epoch of the Tradition. In the alternative and possibly earlier form there is no question that it is of English origin as to its root-matter or that it derives from the ROYAL and SELECT MASTER GRADES, but from the former more especially, and at a time when both were in a state corresponding more nearly to the mode in which they were communicated, not so many years ago, under the auspices of the EARLY GRAND Scottish Rite, rather than that of the CRYPTIC. The latter bears marks of editing by persons who had no acquaintance with the Secret Tradition. As regards all recensions, the time is that of Solomon, the Temple is still uncompleted, but the mythical history in each case is subsequent to the Hiramic myth, which is still left at its original loose end. The Grades in their several forms throw light on the central point of the

Royal Arch, because they shew how a place of concealment was planned for the Secret Mysteries and how these were hidden therein until time or circumstances should render their restoration essential. The implicit throughout is that in such case the providence protecting what is understood as Masonry would intervene in favour of the Art, as it did ex hypothesi at the epoch of the Second Temple.

We may follow the Secret Tradition into strange places of Masonry, and if the intimations are often at variance they are in agreement on at least two points. The Tradition is always concerned with the power and grace of a Word, usually a Divine Name, and there is always an intention to show that a hidden Knowledge concerning it goes on from age to age. There is the Grade of KNIGHT OF THE EAST, which in one of its versions belongs to the Maccabean period, and the Candidate is in search of the Sacred Treasure after the profanations of Andochus Epiphanus. There is the Grade of TRUE SCOTTISH MASTER, which belongs to Adonhiramite Masonry. It affirms that the Word of God was never lost in reality, and that after the sacking of Herod's Temple, at the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, a mysterious inscribed plate was found beneath one of the Pillars. This fable is recited in a kind of historical discourse, and although on the surface we are still in the days of Solomon, we are already on the threshold of Christian Masonry, for the Lodge of the Grade is said to have been instituted by St. John the Evangelist in succession to one which was held on the banks of the Jordan by St. John the Baptist.

When we pass definitely into Christian Masonry the Tradition is still with us, although under several mutations. It owes something to Philostorgus and his ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY, written at the beginning of the 5th Century. In connection with the baffled attempts to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem he tells us of certain workmen let down by means of ropes into a deep well, at the bottom of which - emerging above the water - there was found a small column, and on the column, a book wrapped in a linen cloth. When examined, it proved to be a copy of St. John's Gospel. For the rest, according to Christian Masonry, the Keepers of the Secret Tradition are represented as Knights of the Morning, Knights of Palestine, Sons of the Valley, Thebaid Brethren, a secret Brotherhood perpetuated from generation to generation in the heart of Jewry, but unknown to Jewry at large. They looked for a Master who was to come, the Deliverer and Messiah. In the fullness of time they found the Word in Christ, which is the message of the Christian Grades.

I have been dealing with questions of fact in Ritual and with the tradition out of which they arise. I do not intend on the

present occasion to dwell on the inferences to be drawn, however legitimate. I have followed the Secret Tradition in its development through several paths, within and outside of Masonry. That there is a meaning behind the Tradition I am entirely certain, for it is of symbolism or allegory after its own manner and within its own measures, even as Masonry is. The great BOOK OF THE ZOHAR contains the whole doctrine of the Lost Word and of the circumstances under which it shall be restored on the coming of Israel out of exile, in the day of Messiah. But the ZOHAR is the book of the Secret Tradition in Jewry under the Christian aegis. As regards the Lost Word, it depends from a question of fact, which of itself is of minor consequence, being the loss of the mode in which the High Priest pronounced the Divine Name when he entered the Holy of Holies once a year to make atonement for the sins of the people. Over this the ZOHAR allegorizes and in their fervid hearts the doctors of the Greater Exile looked for magnalia Dei when it should be put again into their mouths. But that which it meant in their symbolism was the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth - to the chosen people above all, but apparently by derivation from these to all tongues and tribes and peoples and nations. The Secret Tradition was taken over by zealous scholars of Christendom during the 16th and 17th Centuries, and they sought to convince Jewry that all which was expected had come in Christ, that it was possessed by the Gentiles and might be enjoyed by them if they would turn their hearts to Him. This is the philosophy of the Tradition in brief and crude summary. But in another form and aspect, it is the philosophy of the Tradition in Masonry, which is another story of a Word in loss or hiddenness, and this fact, which might be one of coincidence, is linked up with the Secret Tradition because it is represented - in variably and only - by a Sacred Name, an omnific and ineffable message, and the plenary grace of a mystery abiding in a Name of God. Now the Tradition of the Name in Masonry was taken over by other Zelatores, who, after all intimations of the ROYAL ARCH OF ENOCH, Arch of Zerubbabel and Arch of Josiah the King, after all that was said to be inscribed on sacred plates of gold, came forward in their later day and founded the Christian Grades - the ORDER OF THE TEMPLE, the ROSE CROIX, the RED CROSS OF CONSTANTINE and KNIGHT OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE. Like other makers of legend, they testified that the Word is Christ. It follows that those rumours of a Secret Tradition which are conveyed in the Royal Arch are not confined thereto. In one or other form, they are in the body- general of Masonry.

What does this fact signify, and where may it lead the Mason who is willing to dwell on such things and, perhaps, pursue them further? The answer to this question is my last word

and a kind of obiter dictum. It signifies that the Secret of Masonry, that Word too often lost, is the Secret of Christ realized in the heart of a Mason, and that from beginning to end our "peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols " has never had another object than to direct us with eyes uplifted to the bright Morning Star, whose rising brings peace and salvation to those who sit in tribulation and in the shadow of death.

Masonry is an art, useful and extensive, which comprehends within its circle every branch of useful knowledge and learning, and stamps an indellible mark of preeminence on its genuine professors, which neither chance, power, nor fortune can bestow. - PRESTON.