**THE CEREMONY OF EXALTATION IN THE HOLY ROYAL ARCH**
taken from Chapter IV of the Meaning of Masonry by William H. Wilmshurst

Again the candidate is in a state of darkness. But the reason of this darkness differs entirely from that which existed at the Entered Apprentice stage. Then he was but an ignorant beginner upon the quest, making his first irregular benighted efforts towards the light.

Now, he has long passed beyond that stage; he comes with all the qualifications and equipment of a Master Mason. Long ago he found the light he first sought, and for long he has been directing his steps and nourishing his growth by its rays.
And more; after all this intimacy with it he has known it recede from him and disappear in the great ordeal of dereliction of the Third Degree, when, in the dark night of the soul and utter helplessness of all his powers, he learned how strength could be perfected out of weakness by the potent efficacy of the Vital and Immortal Principle within him, in whose presence the darkness and the light are both alike.
His present initial deprivation of light is the darkness of the Third Degree carried over into this further experience. It betokens rather a momentary failure to adjust his perception to the new quality of life he is now entering upon, just as a new-born child is unable at first to coordinate its sight to objects before it.
For a while, but only for a brief while, the candidate feels himself in darkness; but he is really blinded rather by excess of light than by lack of it.

In this condition he undertakes the opening out of a certain place which he proceeds to enter and explore, keeping touch meanwhile with his companions by a cord or life-line. The symbolism of all this is singularly rich in allusion to certain interior processes of introspection well defined in the experience of the contemplative mystics and well attested in their records.

The place entered emblematizes once again the material and psychical organism, a dense compact of material particles coating the more tenuous interior spirit of man as a shell surrounds the contents of an egg. **Roll away the stone**, it will be recalled, was the first injunction of the Master at the raising of Lazarus. This obstruction removed, the psychical organism becomes detached from the physical and the mind is free to become introverted and work exploratively upon its own ground, to search the contents of its own unplumbed depths, to probe deeper and deeper into itself, eradicating defects and removing rubble, pushing in and in by the energy of a persistent will, yet retaining contact the while with the outer physical nature by a subtle filament or life-line which prevents their entire separation.

The position is the same as when the body sleeps whilst the mind is dreaming and vividly active, save that in dreams the will is not functioning as a consciously directive instrument as is hypothetically the case with one who, having attained Mastership, has all his faculties under volition and control. Yet all this interior work, so rapidly summarized and symbolically enacted in the Ceremony, is not the work of a day nor the casual task of a weakling. The ancients referred to it as the twelve labours of Hercules, whilst its arduousness is further graphically described by the initiate poet Virgil in the sixth Aeneid and by more recent illuminates. Nor, even when its nature is fully apprehended, is it a work to be lightly undertaken.

Throughout the Ceremony the utmost humility is enjoined upon the candidate as the essential qualification for entering upon this process of self-exploration.

He is bidden to draw nigh to the Centre, but to halt and make obeisance at three several stages, at each of which he is told he is approaching more nearly to that central Essence, that holy ground of his being upon which only the humble can walk, that earth which only the meek shall inherit.

It is in this state that the introverted mind, groping for its own foundation and centre, reaches at length the bedrock of its being. As the symbolic ceremony exhibits the grasping of an emblem embodying the Word of Life, so literally and in fact the questing mind, in coming upon the Vital and Immortal Principle animating it, lays hold on Eternal Life.

It discovers the Lost Word, the divine root of its being, from which it has hitherto been so long dissociated. It fails to realize the fact at first, for the Light shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehendeth it not. Presently that darkness will disappear; when the day (the new consciousness) dawns and the shadows (the old mentality) flee away.

Therefore it is that this work of the introverted mind and the discovery it makes, are exhibited as taking place darkly and amid subterranean gloom.

There remains, therefore, one concluding psychological process to extrovert that knowledge and bring it forward into formalized brain-consciousness, so that what the spirit and the soul already know interiorly the outer mind may also know exteriorly.

Subjective awareness does not become knowledge until it has been cerebrated and passed through the alembic of the brain and the logical understanding. When it has so passed through and become formalized, a reciprocal and reflex action between the inner and outer natures is set up resulting in the illumination of the whole. This extroversion of subjective perceptions is symbolically achieved by the return of the candidate from the subterranean depths to the surface and there rejoining his former companion-sojourners and effecting a unification of all his component parts.

It is then that the Mystery is consummated. The Great Light breaks.

The Vital and Immortal Principle comes to self-consciousness in him.

The Glory of the Lord is revealed to and in him, and all his flesh sees it.

So far as it is possible for symbolic ceremonial to portray it this consummation is represented by the restoration to light and the revelation that then meets the candidates gaze.
His condition differs now from any that has preceded it. It is not merely one of illumination by the Supernal Light. It is one of identification with It. He and It have become one, as a white-hot iron is indistinguishable from the furnace-flame engulfing it.
At the outset of his Masonic quest the predominant wish of his heart was Light.
The impulse was not his own; it was that of the Light Itself the primal Light of light, the Divine Substantial Word-seeking self-development in him.
Consciousness is that Light become self-perceptive by polarization within an efficient physiological organism. Man provides the only organism adapted to the attainment of that self-perception; but only when that organism is purified and prepared sufficiently for the achievement. In the Royal Arch that achievement is hypothetically effected.

The condition attained by the illumined candidate is the equivalent of what in Christian theology is known as Beatific Vision and in the East as /Samadhi/. It is also spoken of as universal or cosmic consciousness, since the percipient, transcending all sense of personal individualization, time and space, is co-conscious with all that is.
He has entered the bliss and peace surpassing that temporal understanding which is limited to perceiving the discords, antinomies and contrasts characterizing finite existence; he has risen to that exalted state where all these find their resolution in the blissful concord of the Eternal. He is in conscious sympathy and identity of feeling with all that lives and feels, in virtue of that universal charity and limitless love which is the corollary of perceiving the unity of all in the Being of Deity, and which at the outset of his progress he was told was the summit of the Masons profession.
He sees too that there is a universe within as well as without him; that he himself microcosmically sums up and contains all that manifested to his temporal intelligence as the vast spacial universe around him. He is himself conscious of being the measure of the universe; he realizes that the earth, the heavens, and all their contents, are externalizations, projected images, of corresponding realities present within himself.
As the perfected head of creation, he beholds how he sums up in himself all the lower forms of life through which his organism has passed to attain to that perfection.

The four symbolic standards exhibiting the lion, ox, man and eagle are a very ancient glyph, declaring among other things the story of the souls evolution and its progress from the passional wild-beast stage to one which, while still sensuous and animal, is docile and disciplined for service, and thence to the stage of human rationality, which at length culminates in upward-soaring spirituality.
Similarly the displayed banners of the twelve Israelitish tribes are again but figures of their prototypes, the twelve zodiacal sections of those heavens which could not exist or be discernible to the outward eye were they not also the phenomenalized aspect of a reality cognizable by the inward eye;

whilst, gathered beneath these emblems, are those who represent the tribes of no terrestrial nation, but are the tribes of God, the heavenly hierarchies that constitute an archetypal canopy or holy royal arch above the visible creation and that mediate to it the effluences of that all embracing triune Spirit of Power, Wisdom and Love in which the entire composite structure lives, moves and has its being.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep.
And God said, Let there be light, and there was light.
With these words begins the Sacred Script which is the sacramental token of that Living Word by whom all things were made, and are still in the making, and whose life is the light of men.
The candidate who recovers that lost Word, in the sense of regaining vital organic integration into it, and who, therefore, is one with its Life and its Light, is able to verify this old creation-story in its personal application to himself.
He stands in the presence of his own earth the stone vault or dense matrix out of which his finer being has emerged and of his own heavens or ethereal body of substantialized radiance which (as the iridescent sash of the Order is meant to denote) now covers him with light as with a garment.
He is able to discern that it was himself who at first was without form and void and who in virtue of that /Fiat Lux!/ has at last become transformed from chaos and unconsciousness into a form so perfect and lucid as to become a co-conscious vehicle of Divine Wisdom itself.

With this symbolic attainment of Beatific Vision at the restoration to light, the effective part of the Royal Arch Ceremony as an initiatory rite concludes.
What follows upon it is anti-climax and allegorical exposition of a similar nature to the traditional history in the Master Masons Degree.
This takes the form of a mythos or dramatic narrative by the three sojourners, describing their release from captivity in Babylon, their return to Jerusalem under an impulse to assist in rebuilding the destroyed national temple, their work among its ruins and the discovery of an ancient and apparently important archive. The perspicacious mind will not fail to perceive in this historical or quasi-historical narrative an allegory of the spiritual process which has been going on within the candidate himself. It is he, as it is every human soul, that has been in Babylonian bondage, in captivity to the Babel-confusion of mundane existence, the tyranny of material interests, and the chaos of his own disordered nature.
It is he who, in revolt from these, has in reflective moments sat down and wept by the waters of Babylon the transient flux of temporal things and remembered Zion?, in a yearning for inward freedom and permanent peace of heart.
It is he who finds the temple of his old natural self worthless and in ruins, and realizes that upon its site he must rebuild another and worthier one.

From within himself comes the urge of the inward Lord (Kurios) which (under the mask of Cyrus the king) bids him forthwith depart from his captivity and go up to his true native-land and re-erect the Lords house.
It is himself who discovers among the rubble of his old self the plans and the material for the new structure. And ultimately when that new structure is completed and, when from natural man he has become reorganized into spiritual man, it is he who is able to perceive the wonders of his own constitution, to behold his own earth and his own ?heavens now fused into a unity to which both his material and his spiritual nature were necessary contributors.

The constitution of the Chapter as first revealed to the candidate is, therefore, a symbol of his perfected organism. He sees that it is polarized East and West; the East occupied by the three Principals, signifying his spiritual pole; the West, occupied by the three Sojourners, his psychic and materialized pole; each triad being the reflex of the other, yet each triad being an organic unity in itself.

St. John testifies to this (and the ceremonial rite is made conformable to the teaching of that great Initiate) when he writes :
There are three that bear record in heaven, and these three are one.

And there are three that bear witness in earth, and these three agree in one. The meaning of this metaphysical assertion is that, just as a ray of white light splits up (as in the rainbow) into three primary colours which still remain organically united, so both the self-knowing Spirit in man and his psychical nature, although monadic essentially, are prismatically dissociable into a trinity.
The Spirit in man in its triple aspects is, therefore, appropriately typified by the three Principals.
They represent the three high attributes of the Spirit Holiness, Royal Supremacy, Functional Power referred to in the title of the Order; Holy-Royal-Arch.
The middle and neutral term of these three must be considered as differentiating itself into a passive and an active, or a negative and a positive aspect; although all three act conjointly and as one (as is in fact the case with the three Principals of a Chapter).

These three aspects of monadic Spirit are personified as Haggai (passive), Joshua (active), with Zerubabel as the middle term from which the other two issue and into which they merge.
For the central Majesty is in one of its aspects silent and withdrawn and in the other functionally active and compulsive.

So too, with the triad of Sojourners at the other pole. They represent the unitary human Ego or personality also in its threefold aspects. They are the incarnated antitype or physicalized reflex of man?s archetypal unincarnated and overshadowing Spirit. Hence they are designated Sojourners, as being but transient consociated pilgrims or wayfarers upon a plane of impermanence, in contrast with the enduring life of the

deathless spirit whose projection upon this lower world they are. Psychologically, human personality is distributed into a passive negative subconsciousness and an active positive intelligence, linked together by a central co-ordinating principle, the combined three constituting man?s unitary individuality. My ego with its central and directive power of will is my principal sojourner; my subconsciousness with its passive intuitional capacity, and my practical intelligence with its active and connecting powers of thought and understanding, are my assistant sojourners. Let me see to it that, like their symbolic representatives, they are kept clothed in white and so able to reflect and react to their correspondences in the eastern or spiritual pole of my being.

The nexus or connecting medium between man?s spiritual and bodily poles is represented by a third triad impersonated by the two Scribes and the Janitor. The more important of these scribes is attached to the East pole and is as it were its emissary towards the West; the other is associated with the Western pole and his activities are directed Eastwards; whilst the Door-keeper is the point of contact with the world without. In one of their many significances they typify the middle term between Spirit and Matter-the astral medium or psychic bridge, in virtue of which contact between them is possible.

Heavily veiled beneath the sacramentalism of a council of the Jewish Sanhedrim, the Royal Arch Ceremony therefore exhibits in a most graphic manner the psychologic rationale of the final stage of regeneration. To the literalist, unacquainted with the fact that, in both Sacred Writ and the teaching of the Mysteries, surface appearances are always intended to be transposed into spiritual values and that quasi-historic characters are meant to be impersonations of philosophic facts or principles, some difficulty may be felt on being asked to translate the quasi-historicity of the ceremonial text into the spiritualized interpretation here offered. The education and enlightenment of the understanding is, however, one of the deliberate intentions of Initiatory Rites, and until the mind is able to rise above merely material facts and habituate itself to functioning in the truer realm of ideas which materialize into facts and make facts possible, there is small chance of its profiting from Rites like those of Masonry, which are of wholly negligible value but for the spiritual force and vitalizing energy of their inherent ideas. It may, therefore, be both helpful and a corroboration of what has been said if we scrutinize the Hebrew names of a Chapter?s officers; what they yield upon analysis will demonstrate that those officers impersonate ideas rather than represent persons.

1. ?/Zerubabel, prince of the people/.? The name literally means ?a

sprouting forth from Babel, or from among the people?. ?Babel? and ?people? are two forms of expressing the same idea and the English word is almost identical with the Hebrew one. Society as a whole, the multitude, ?the people? (?bebeloi? as it is in Greek), at all times of the world?s history constitutes a Babel of confused aims and interests. But there are always individuals intellectually or spiritually in advance of the crowd and whose ideas, teachings or example shoot ahead of it, and to such leaders the name Zerubabel would apply. But this illustration does not express the deeper sense in which the word must be construed, which is one of personal application. The individual is himself a mob, a chaos, a multitude of confused desires, thoughts, passions, until these are brought into discipline. But, present even amidst these and sprouting up from among them, the ordinary man is conscious of a higher and spiritual element in him, which he may cultivate or disregard, but which in his best moments flames up above his lower disordered nature, convinces him of the errors of his ways, and entices him to live from that higher level. That loftier element is expressed by the word ?Zerubabel?; it is the apex and focus point of his spirituality as distinguished from his ordinary carnal intelligence; the summit of all his faculties, the ?prince? of his ?people?. Those same faculties or ?people? are referred to in the word meaning ?My people having obtained mercy? (or become regenerate), and in the text ?The people that sat in darkness have seen a great light?.

2. ?/Haggai the Prophet/.? As has been shown before, the spiritual principle differentiates into a passive and an active aspect. ?Haggai? represents the passive aspect and signifies at once the blissful and self-contemplative nature of the spirit. It is called ?the prophet? because of the power of insight and omniscience characterizing that which transcends the sense of time and abides eternally, and because it projects into the lower intelligence intuitions, foreglimpses and intimations of a prophetic nature. From the same word is derived the Greek word ?hagios,? holy.

3. ?/Joshua, the son of Josedek, the high priest/.? personifies the active executive aspect of spirit. Literally Joshua means the ?divine saviour?, and Josedek ?divine righteousness?, whilst the ?high priest? connotes a mediatorial factor between man and Deity. The title in its entirety therefore intimates that the human spirit or divine principle in man functions intermediately between Deity and man?s lower nature to promote the latter?s salvation and perfection. We have previously shown how the Master Mason must be his own high priest and ?walk upon? the chequered floor-work of his elementary nature by learning to trample upon it. Thus the Three Principals form a unity figuring man?s spiritual pole in its triple aspects; they represent the summit of his being as it lives on the plane of the Spirit?holy, royal, supreme?blissful because

in a state of holiness or wholeness; royal because a son of the King of all; powerful because of its power to subdue, transmute and redeem all that is below its own purity and perfection.

4 & 5. /Ezra and Nehemiah/. In the great Mystery system of Egypt, which long anteceded the Hebrew system, the regenerate candidate, who had achieved the highest possible measure of self-transmutation of his lower nature, was accorded the title of Osiris. It was the equivalent of attaining Christhood. The nature of the perfectioning process and the rituals in connection therewith are, thanks to certain modern scholars, available to us and are recommended to the student who desires to know how arduous and real that process was and the extremely high degree of regeneration aimed at. In Hebrew the title Osiris became changed into Azarias (and sometimes Zeruiah) and still further corrupted into Esdras and Ezra, the name of the senior Scribe of the Royal Arch. To understand the significance of the two Scribes Ezra and Nehemiah it is necessary to recall that, in the Biblical account of the return from Babylonian captivity, these two were leading men. Transposing this historicized narrative into its spiritual implication, Ezra and Nehemiah personify two distinct stages of the mystical progress made by the candidate who essays to renounce the Babel of his lower nature and, by reorganizing himself, regain his native spiritual home and condition. ?Nehemiah? (whose place in the Chapter is in the South West) is a figure of a certain measure of that reorganization and return. Like his Biblical prototype, he symbolizes the candidate engaged in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem, and occupied in the great work of self-reconstruction, from which he will not be beguiled into coming down by the appeals and blandishments of the outer world. ?Ezra? (whose position is in the North East) indicates a much more advanced measure of progress from West to East. The discerning student who will peruse the Biblical books of Nehemiah and Ezra (including the Apocryphal books of Esdras) in this light, and with this key to their true purport, will not fail to profit by the instruction they will yield. Hence too they are called ?scribes?; both of them are recorders of, and testifiers to, distinct but representative experiences encountered in the inner man at different stages of the ?great work? of self-integration and journeying from a Babylon condition to the spiritual Jerusalem.

Here we bring to an end our examination of the true meaning and purpose of the Royal Arch Ceremony. Dealing as it does with a supreme human experience which none can fully appreciate without undergoing it, it is the greatest and most momentous rite in Masonry, and no one who studies it comprehendingly and in its sacramental significance will withhold admiration either for the profound knowledge and insight of the now unidentifiable mystic and initiate who conceived it or for the skill with which he compiled it and cast his knowledge into dramatic

expression. The pity of it is that those who practise the rite make no effort to penetrate its meaning and are content with the unenlightened perfunctory performance of a ritual which even exoterically is singularly striking, beautiful and suggestive. The least reflection upon it must suggest that Masonry is here dealing with the building-work of no outward structure, but with the re-erection of the fallen, disordered temple of the human soul; and that even assuming that it but memorialized some long past historic events, those events can have no vital bearing upon the life, character or conduct of anyone to-day and would not justify the existence of an elaborate secret Order to perpetuate them. But if those events and this rite be symbolic of something deeper and something personal; if they sacramentalize truths perpetually valid and capable of present realization in those who ceremonially re-enact them, then they call for fuller and more serious attention than is usually accorded. Moreover, if the Royal Arch be the symbolic representation of a supreme experience attained and attainable only in sanctity and by the regenerate, it follows that the Craft Degrees leading up to and qualifying for it will take on a much deeper sense than they commonly receive and must be regarded as solemn instructions in the requisite preparation for that regenerate condition. The Craft work is unfinished without the attainment forth shadowed in the Royal Arch. That attainment in turn is impossible without the discipline of the preliminary labours, the purification of mind and desire, and that crucifixion unto death of the self-will which constitute the tests of merit qualifying for entrance to that Jerusalem which has no geographical site and which is called the ?City of Peace? because it implies conscious rest of the soul in God. For many, the suggestion that the attainment of such a condition is possible or thinkable whilst we are still here in the flesh may be surprising or even incredible. But such doubt is unwarranted, and the Masonic doctrine negates it. As has been already shown to the contrary, that doctrine postulates not the absence but the possession of the material organism as a necessary factor in advancing the evolution of the human spirit; that organism is the vessel in which our base metal has to be transmuted into gold; it is the fulcrum furnishing the resistance requisite for the spirit?s energizing into unfoldment and self-consciousness. Physical death is therefore not an advancement of, but an interference with, the work of regeneration. ?The night cometh when no man can work,? and when the soul merely passes from labour to refreshment until recalled to labour once more at the task of self-conquest. It is but figurative of that necessary dying to self which implies the voluntary decreasing assertiveness of our temporal nature to permit of a corresponding ascendancy of the spiritual.

But if in the hands of its present exponents Masonry is now rather a dead letter than a living effectual Initiatory Rite capable of

quickening the spirituality of its candidates, it still remains for the earnest and perspicuous aspirant to the deeper verities an instructive economy of the science of self-gnosis and regeneration. For such these papers are written, that they may both learn something of the original design of the Order and educate their imagination in the principles of that science. And to such, in conclusion, may be commended that Temple-hymn of the Hebrew Initiates, which of all the Psalms of David refers with most pointed reference to the subject-matter of the supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch of Jerusalem and the personal attainment of the blessed and perfected condition which that title implies :

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I was glad when they said unto me, let us go up into the house of the Lord;

Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together; Thither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord. .. .

For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem ! they shall prosper that love it.

Peace is within her walls and plenteousness within her palaces.

For my brethren and companions? sake I will say,

Peace be within thee.

(Psalm CXXIL)

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In those few lines is sketched all that is implied in the symbolic spectacle that greets the eyes of the Royal Arch Mason at the supreme moment of his restoration to light. Exalted into and become identified with the supreme bliss, peace and self-consciousness of the All-Pervasive and Omniscient Spirit, he sees how he has ?gone up? out of the Babylon of his old complex and disordered nature and upon its ruins has built for himself an ethereal body of glory, a ?house of the Lord?. He sees how this ecstatic condition and this new-made celestial body are the sublimated products of his former self and its temporal organism. He sees how each separate part and faculty of that old nature, or as it were each of the zodiacal divisions of his own microcosm, has contributed its purified essence to form a new organism, ?a new heaven and a new earth?; and how these essences, like twelve diversified

tribes, have assembled convergently and finally coalesced and become fused into a unity or new whole, ?a city that is compact together?. And it is this ?city?, this blessed condition, which mystically is called ?Jerusalem?, within whose walls is the peace which passeth understanding and whose palaces reveal to the enfranchised soul the unfailing plenteousness and fecundity of the indissoluble trinity of Wisdom and Love and Power from which man and the universe have issued and into which they are destined to return.

The antithesis of this ?heavenly-city? is the confused Babylon city of this world, of which it is written to all captives therein, ?Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins and that ye receive not of her plagues!? (Rev. xviii. 4). And, in a word, the Royal Arch Ceremony sacramentally portrays the last phase of the mystical journey of the exiled soul from Babylon to Jerusalem as it escapes from its captivity to this lower world and, passing the veils? of matter and form, breaks through the bondage of corruption into the world of the formless Spirit and realizes the glorious liberty of the children of God.

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