

# INTRODUCTION TO THE HIGHER DEGREES OF FREEMASONRY

by Jacques Huyghebaert

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## INTRODUCTION

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In England, the very name of "Higher Degrees" usually causes strong protest and resentment from supporters of Craft or "Blue" Lodges.

The Constitution of the United Grand Lodge of England declares indeed that "Pure and Antient Masonry consists of three degrees, and no more, viz, those of the Entered Apprentice, the Fellow Craft, and the Master Mason, including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch."

Moreover, many English Brethren consider the Higher Degrees to be but "pure fabrications introduced by those, on the European Continent, to whom the operative tradition was not sufficient ..." (1)

The origin of those higher degrees has been and is still the subject of extensive historical research and highly emotional controversies among Masons.

It is however an indisputable fact that those "Higher Degrees", also called "Additional" or "Side" degrees, have played a considerable role in European Freemasonry from the 1750's onwards.

Scottish Rite Masonry, which today represents the most developed and widespread system of "Higher Degrees" in the world, counts over six hundred thousand members in the United States only.

In Europe and in Latin America these higher degrees, ranking from the 4th to the 33rd degree, are also very popular and are considered as the natural itinerary for all those who are interested in perfecting their Masonic education.

In an official publication issued in 1988, under authority of the Supreme Council of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, Washington, D.C., Bro. Rex R. Hutchinson writes that : (2)

" Modern speculative Freemasonry did not spring full blown upon the historical stage at a London pub or tavern meeting in 1717."

"The operative Masons had already contributed a long legacy of symbolism and tradition that continues to enrich the Craft to this day."

"Also there are persistent references in Masonic ritual, especially in the Higher Degrees, to relationships with Rosicrucians, Illuminati, Gnostics, Alchemists, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Christians, Essenes, Persians, Hindus and Kabbalists."

"Whether these presumed relations demonstrate a continuous heritage, of which modern Freemasonry is the linear successor, or simply emulation is the central question of Masonic historical research."

"Whatever the truth of history, the contributions to the symbolism of Freemasonry by the religions, philosophies, mythologies and occult mysteries of the past lie upon its surface for all to see."

"Rather than being a secret society, Freemasonry is a revealer of secrets. The great truths of ancient man were, in their time, also great secrets and few were admitted into the sanctuaries where these truths were taught."

"Today Freemasonry teaches these truths to all worthy men who ask to learn them."

"Many of these truths are taught in the three degrees of the Craft Lodge; but many more are taught in the Higher Degrees of various Rites which have sprung up in the course of Masonic History."

#### THE SCOTTISH RITE

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What is the Scottish Rite?

Henry C. Clausen, Past Sovereign Grand Commander of the Supreme Council, 33rd and last degree of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, Mother Supreme Council of the World, as well as Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of California, describes the Scottish Rite as follows : (3)

" Historically, the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry evolved from the Rite of Perfection more than 200 years ago on the continent of Europe under the Constitutions of 1762."

"Later the Grand Constitutions of 1786 were enacted and became the creative and derivative laws for all descendant Supreme Councils of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite."

"The first Supreme Council was organized at Charleston S.C., in 1801, as the Mother Supreme Council of the World, and hence all regular and recognized Supreme Councils throughout the world must trace their pedigree to it."

"But the actual roots of the Scottish Rite go far deeper. Tracing them is a romantic and exciting quest for adventure in the realm of the mind and the spirit. It is a superb story of success - more intriguing than the storied search for the Holy Grail and more rewarding than a successful probe for the philosopher's stone."

"Our teachings and symbols preceded our formal organizations by thousands of years. They go deep into ancient ages. The signs, symbols and inscriptions come from across long, drifting centuries and will be found in the tombs and temples of India to those of Nubia, through the Valley of the Nile in Egypt down to its Delta, as well as in what was then known as Chaldea, Assyria, Persia, Greece, Rome and even in Mexico and Yucatan."

"The Scottish Rite, therefore, is a treasure house in which there is stored the ageless essence of immutable laws, the accumulation of thousands of years of human experience."

"We learn our mission in a system of progressive degrees of instruction. We teach our members the highest ethics, the wise expositions of philosophy and religion, the blessings of charity. Our code of conduct stems from the precepts of Chivalry, the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule. We reveal truly the wisdom of the Lesser and Greater Mysteries and their symbols of words and phrases long considered lost. These were the truths that Plato, Pythagoras, Socrates, Homer and other intellects of the ages held in high esteem, that have reappeared in later religions, and that never were disclosed until after timely preparation of selected and trusted Initiates."

"Our degrees represent the study of many men during many years and at a heavy cost, the culling of hundreds of volumes for effective portrayals and illustrations and more labour than the accumulated endeavours of a lifetime engaged in efforts to attain eminence or riches.

"Our members therefore receive a gift of the greatest value. They gain a comprehensive knowledge of our heritage of history, philosophy, religion, morality, freedom and toleration, and of their relationship to their Creator, their country, their family and themselves.

"These may well lead to that understanding of identity, clarity of mind and energy of will that propel toward personal success in life."

"We carry our mission in a series of spiritual, charitable and moral programs. We make living, breathing, vital parts of our activities the recovery and maintenance of moral standards and spiritual values, the pride of patriotism and love of flag and country, the dispensing of a charity without regard to race, colour, or creed."

"We stand for positive programs but fight with moral courage and enthusiasm every force or power that would seek to destroy freedom, including spiritual despotism and political tyranny. We believe and teach that sovereignty of the state resides in control by the people themselves and not in some self-appointed dictator or despotic totalitarian. We therefore advocate complete separation of church and state, absolute freedom and protection of religion, press and assembly, and the dignity of every individual. Those we consider vital for the ultimate liberties and independence of our people."

CHEVALIER RAMSAY

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Cfr. "Chevalier Ramsay, a new appreciation", by Cyril N. Batham, Transactions of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge, 1967, Volume 81, pp. 280-315.

"Little scientific evidence is available about the beginnings of Freemasonry in France and French Masonic historians vary greatly in their accounts."

"Masonic tradition reports that Freemasonry had been in existence in France long time before the arrival in France of contingents of the defeated Jacobite army in 1688."

"Indeed, according to Chevalier Ramsay, Freemasonry had managed to "preserve its splendour among those Scotsmen to whom the Kings of France confided during many centuries the safeguard of their Royal persons".

"The first authoritatively documented foundation of a Lodge in Paris however dates only from 1725. (4) One of the pioneers in this development was Charles Radclyffe, a Stuart exile, who later assumed the title of Earl of Derwentwater and was Grand Master in Paris from 1736 to 1738." (5)

"On 17th March 1730, the London Evening Post announced that Chevalier Ramsay had been made a Mason by the Duke of Richmond at the Horn Lodge in Westminster." (6) (7)

"Chevalier Ramsay, who had been staying in England since 1729, had been admitted previously to the Royal Society and to the Gentlemen's Society of Spalding. It should also be recorded that he was the first Catholic since the Reformation to receive the degree of Civil Law at Oxford University."

"After his return to France, we note both Ramsay and Radclyffe as members of the Grand Master's (St.Thomas) Lodge."

"It is obvious that Chevalier Ramsay must have derived great satisfaction from Masonry and devoted himself to the Craft with zeal and enthusiasm, for we soon hear of him as Grand Orator of the Order." (8)

"It is widely believed that Ramsay prepared his famous oration for delivery at the Grand Lodge meeting in Paris on 21st March 1737."

"From 1738 onwards, it seems that reprobation of the Order by Prime Minister Cardinal Fleury as well as a failing health may have caused a falling off in Chevalier Ramsay's Masonic activities." (9)

#### RAMSAY'S ORATION

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In his oration, Ramsay referred to Masonry as having been founded in remote antiquity, but said that it was renewed in the Holy Land by the Crusaders who had united in Palestine for a noble purpose and to whom he referred to as our Ancestors.

In saying this, unless of course we believe the full content of his oration to be pure truth, which Masonic scholars are not inclined to do, by lack of sufficient historical evidence, we can only speculate that Ramsay, who had been granted a Certificate of Nobility and created Knight and Baronet by King James, the Old Pretender, may perhaps have been inspired by the references made to medieval orders when he was dubbed a Knight of St. Lazarus.

The order, it should be stressed, into which he was admitted was not a Masonic Order, but a very real and prestigious Order of Nobility, founded about 1220 in Jerusalem by the Crusaders. Its full name was "the Military Order of the Hospitallers of Saint-Lazarus of Jerusalem" (10)

In addition, we can assume that his interest in the Crusades may have been aroused by his professional connections with the Turenne family, who was descended from Godfrey of Bouillon, the leader of the first Crusade, and who owned the old ancestral castle in the Ardennes. (11)

It could also have been that he was anxious to make Freemasonry attractive to the many members of the nobility who had joined Masonry or that he had been given some directions as to the content of this particular address by his friend and Brother Charles Radclyffe, who was Grand Master at the time.

Somewhat similar considerations may have prompted him to refer to Kilwinning, whose Masonic history was no doubt well known to him through his association with that town.

An anonymous "Letter from the Grand Mistress" which had been published in 1724 stated indeed that : "The famous old Scottish Lodge of Kilwinning, of which all the Kings of Scotland have been, from time to time, Grand Masters without interruption, down from the days of Fergus, who reigned there more than two thousand years ago, long before the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, or the Knights of Malta, to which two Lodges I must nevertheless, allow the honour of having adorned the ancient Jewish and Pagan Masonry with many religious and Christian rules ... "

Nowhere however in his speech did Ramsay refer or suggest the actual creation of any additional degrees. We also have no trace that Ramsay himself was ever made a member of any Higher Degree Masonic Body.

Prior to his Oration, there is little trace of what is known as "Scots Masonry", but it appears in France soon afterwards and spreads rapidly.

By coupling the Crusades and Masonry in Scotland in his Grand Lodge Oration, Chevalier Ramsay gave authority and honourability to the nascent Higher Degrees.

Indeed, since these rites could not be put forward as modern inventions, respectable ancestry had to be found for them in order to make them acceptable.

Scotland was the obvious choice. It was remote enough, it had a long political alliance with France and many of its countrymen were living in France, either by choice or as Stuart exiles. Ramsay, a Scot, a Grand Lodge Officer and a prominent Freemason at that time, was on hand and had made a speech providing Masonry with an ancient, noble and romantic history and he had referred to its existence from prior to 1286. Nothing could have been better.

#### THE JACOBITE LINK

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Keeping a critical attitude towards Chevalier Ramsay and therefore accepting the theory of an "invented genealogy" for the Higher Degrees, would be satisfactory for all historical and Masonic purposes if various documents and letters, containing references to Masonic "Chevaliers" had not been found, indicating that those Higher Degrees were already in existence at the time or even before he wrote his Oration.

While Cyril N. Batham concludes about this particular point "that this is all so confusing", there is no doubt that Jacobite Lodges played a crucial role in the course of the next decade in spreading the Higher Scottish Degrees and publicising Templar heritage within Freemasonry.

Baron Karl Gottlieb von Hund, a German nobleman and Freemason, was according to himself, initiated into the "Higher degrees" and dubbed "Knight Templar", while in Paris in 1743, by an "Unknown Superior" identified to him only under the name of "the Knight of the Red Feather". (12)

The form of Freemasonry to which von Hund had been introduced was subsequently to become a very popular Rite in Prussia, in the German and Austrian Empires, as well as, until the present day, in the Scandinavian countries, under the name of System of "Strict Observance" which claimed to be descended directly from the Knights Templar. As a matter of curiosity, it should be mentioned that Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was initiated in a Lodge belonging to the Strict Observance. (13)

To his own embarrassment von Hund was never able to support his claims and as a consequence already some of his contemporaries dismissed him as a charlatan. This fact did not affect however in any way the success of the Higher Degrees.

The dubbing ceremony in Paris, he maintained until his death had been performed in presence of, among others, Charles Radclyffe, Earl of Derwentwater, Lord Clifford (14) and the Earl of Kilmarnock (15); while the "Knight of the Red Feather" he assumed to have been Charles Edward Stuart himself.

"Bonnie" Prince Charles however, when questioned about this particular point, after von Hund's death, is reported to have denied it.

Michael Baigent & Richard Leigh have recently discovered some papers indicating that the "Knight of the Red Feather" might have been instead Alexander Seton, more generally known as Alexander Montgomery, Earl of Eglinton. (16)

When Ramsay died, a few months after Von Hund's initiation in Paris into the Higher Degrees, his death certificate was signed by the same Alexander Montgomery, Earl of Eglinton and Charles Radclyffe, Earl of Derwentwater, both of whom were very active Jacobite Freemasons and, as we just have seen, were also directly involved with the development of the Higher Degrees. In the second half of the 18th century the Higher Degrees developed into a large number of systems or Rites many of which were short-lived.

#### THE SITUATION TODAY

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Only those systems that are worked today in Belgium will be considered here.

All systems share one common characteristic, namely that their upper degrees refer to the legends related to the suppression of the ancient Order of Knights Templar and its survival within the modern Order of Freemasonry.

One system already mentioned earlier developed into the Rite of Perfection, which in turn gave birth in the United States to the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite.

The main problem for members of Chevalier Ramsay Lodge with the A. & A.S.R. is that all Lodges of Perfection, Chapters and Councils work either in French or in Dutch, but not in English.

A second system developed in the United States into what has come to be known as the York Rite. It includes degrees such as Knights of the Red Cross,

Knights of Malta and Knights Templar, but the degrees which are worked here are only those of Mark Master and Royal Arch and were transmitted to Belgium from England.

The advantage for us is that ritual work in English is available and that membership allows us to meet with Brethren from the four English speaking Lodges in Belgium.

A third system, the Rectified Scottish Rite was created in France and is derived directly from the Rite of Strict Observance, from which it has taken over its specific Christian characteristics. It counts seven degrees including Craft Masonry which it encompasses as well. Several Lodges of this type are active in our Constitution, Geoffrey de St. Omer Lodge being one of them, in Brussels, and working in French.

It should be stated, that in England and Wales, in some of its former colonies such as South Africa, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Hong Kong, Australia and New Zealand, as well as in Scotland and Ireland membership to some Higher Degrees, Mark and Royal Arch degrees excepted, is restricted to Trinitarian Christians.

In the Scandinavian countries, the same restrictive religious rule is extended to the Craft degrees.

No such regulation is however applicable in the United States, in Latin America, or in Europe, where the conditions for admission are the same as in Craft Masonry, and where accordingly, a Mason of any faith can join.

As an unfortunate consequence, no Masonic relations and intervisitation is possible between Christians-only Masonic Orders and the other Higher Degrees Bodies. This fact should be borne in mind particularly by our English Brethren.

This difference stems from the ritual content of the Higher Degrees, related to the history of Christian Orders of Chivalry in the Holy Land and some episodes of the Crusades.

Whereas in countries where Christians dominate, ritual is considered in its literal sense, elsewhere Brethren see, much beyond the religious, traditional and historical interpretations of the ceremonies, the more important source and deeper meaning of Chivalric symbolism and allegories, so expressive and capable of dramatic enactments.

Chivalric ceremonies have been retained within Masonry for their power to illustrate and explain the same moral, spiritual and Masonic truths, which we already have been taught in Craft Masonry, and the universal value of which extends to all mankind without distinction.

#### THE CHIVALRIC ORDERS

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As already stated, while any direct connection with the original Knights Templar, Knights of Malta or Knights of St. John has yet to be proved, several of the upper Higher Degrees ceremonies and rituals, are actually based upon the ancient orders of chivalry. (17)

A brief account of the history of these ancient orders is therefore necessary.

Palestine had been under Arab control since 637 A.D. The Mohammedans considered Jesus of Nazareth the second prophet after Mohammed and permitted Christian pilgrims free access to the holy shrines.

Small hospitals had been established by Christian residents to provide for the pilgrim needs. One of these had been established in Jerusalem in 1046 by the merchants of Amalfi, Italy and was named the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem. This was manned by serving brothers having no initial affiliation with a religious order.

In 1076 A.D. the Ottoman Turks conquered the Holy Land and proceeded to persecute the Christian community and defile the Christian shrines. A pilgrim, known as Peter the Hermit, returned to Europe and began to preach a crusade to free the Holy Land from the Turkish scourge.

Pope Urban II called for a church council at Clermont, France in 1095 to organize a "Holy War ...". While the Princes of Europe were assembling their armies, Peter the Hermit led an unruly mob toward Jerusalem. The remnants of this "Peoples Crusade" were annihilated by the Turks at Nicaea.

The First Crusade set out for Palestine in 1096. The Crusaders were led by Count Raymond of Toulouse, Robert of Normandy, Godfrey of Bouillon, his brother Baldwin of Flanders, Tancred, Count Bohemond, Hugh de Vermandois, brother of the King of France, and Stephen of Blois.

Taking different routes, the various armies assembled at Constantinople. Proceeding towards Jerusalem, they invested Nicaea which surrendered rather than to be destroyed. The army then advanced to Antioch in 1097 and captured it by bribing a tower guard on June 3, 1098.

Marching through the deserts and mountains of northern Palestine, the Christian army of approximately 20,000 men arrived before the gates of Jerusalem.

After prayers of thanksgiving and supplication, they humbly marched barefooted around the walls and then invested the city. They captured Jerusalem by assault on July 15, 1099, thus bringing the First Crusade to a successful conclusion.

Godfrey of Bouillon was selected to be King of Jerusalem but he only accepted the title of "Baron and Defender of the Holy Sepulchre", declining to wear a crown of gold where Christ had worn a crown of thorns.

The country was portioned out to the nobility of the crusade and castles were constructed for defense. Godfrey died within a year and was succeeded by his brother Baldwin.

Many Europeans now undertook pilgrimages to the Holy Land but were constantly attacked and ravaged by bands of thieves and robbers, who inhabited the mountains and deserts of Palestine.

According to Chevalier Ramsay's Oration, the origin of Masonic signs and words is to be found during the Crusades, when a language was composed, taken from operative Masonry, sometimes mute, sometimes very eloquent, in order to communicate with one another at the greatest distance, to recognize Brothers of whatever tongue and thus to guarantee them from the surprises of the Saracens, who often crept in amongst them to kill them.

These signs and words, Chevalier Ramsay adds, were only communicated to those who promised solemnly, even sometimes at the foot of the altar, never to reveal them.

Ramsay further declares that, sometime afterwards, our Order formed an intimate union with the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem and has, from that time, adopted that name to designate our own Lodges.

Finally, drawing a parallel between the Biblical account of the reconstruction of King Solomon's Temple after the captivity of the Jews in Babylon, Ramsay compares the Union between Knights and Masons with the ancient Israelites, who, whilst they handled the trowel and mortar with one hand, in the other held the sword and buckler.

#### THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR

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In 1118, nine Christian Knights formed a fighting unit to patrol the Palestine roads and escort pilgrims on their journey. Their leader was Hugh de Payens, a Burgundian Knight. They named their band the "Poor Fellow Soldiers of Christ".

Baldwin II, King of Jerusalem, assigned this organization quarters near the Moslem Dome of the Rock, the former site of King Solomon's Temple, which soon became shortened to Order of the Knights of the Temple. The Templars assumed a perpetual vow to be faithful to the Order before the Patriarch of Jerusalem.

In 1128 A.D., Hugh de Payens, with a companion, were sent as emissaries of King Baldwin to the Church Council of Troyes. On their journey they solicited the aid and support of Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux (St. Bernard) to secure ecclesiastical sanction for their order. In this they were successful and the Templars assumed the rule of the Benedictines and the white habit of that order. Pope Eugenius III decreed that they would wear a red cross above the heart. While in Europe, Hugh de Payens secured additional support for his order in the form of recruits and financial assistance.

The order was divided into three branches, the Knights, who had to be of noble birth; the serving brothers who served as sergeants and men-at-arms; and the Chaplains.

The Templars built many castles throughout Palestine. They participated in all of the major battles and the various crusades, until the Christian forces were driven from the Holy Land in 1291 A.D.

Philip IV, the King of France, being envious of the power and wealth of the Templars, and requiring funds for his personal projects, entered into an arrangement with Pope Clement V to suppress the Order and avail himself of their French properties.

Pope Clement invited the Grand Master of the Temple, Jacques DeMolay, to Paris ostensibly to discuss plans for a new crusade. The Grand Master of the Hospital was also invited but declined the invitation. Upon arriving in Paris, DeMolay and his followers were arrested on October 13, 1307.

The Knights Templar were charged with many alleged crimes, tortured, and the Grand Master Jacques DeMolay was burned at the stake on an Island in the Seine

River on March 18, 1314, along with Guy de Charney, Grand Preceptor of Normandy. To the last, DeMolay maintained his innocence and that of the Order.

Pope Clement issued a Papal Bull suppressing the Order. This was enforced in each country, but to different degrees. France executed all Templars who would not recant, many however escaped.

The Templar properties in England were turned over to the Knights of St. John but the members melted away. There is no record of persecution in Scotland and Spain, however, the Templar properties acquired other owners. Within 3 years a new organization titled the Order of Knights of Christ was formed in Portugal by King Dion II and Pope John XXII permitted the Templar estates to be turned over to that new order in 1319.

Thousands of Templars survived the suppression. Considering that most of the members had been either soldiers, administrators in banking and commerce, and craftsmen with numerous trades, this influx into the European economy must have had a decided effect. The Templar way of life was dispersed rather than suppressed.

First, the Templars were not persecuted in Scotland. In 1314, Robert the Bruce defeated a major English army at Bannockburn and became King of Scotland. Masonic ritual reports that the Scottish Templars were fighting on his side. Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh claim to have discovered hundreds of ancient tombs in Scotland bearing Masonic and Templar signs to support this legend.  
(18)

Additionally, Wylie B. Wendt, the noted Masonic scholar has written, on what he considers fair authority, it is reported that Sir John Graham of Claverhouse, Viscount Dundee, was Grand Master of the Scottish Templars, when he fell at the Battle of Killie-Crankie on July 27, 1689 and was found wearing the Grand Cross of the Order. While this proves nothing, it indicates a thread of Templar existence after the suppression.

Second, one John Mark Larmenius claimed as early as in 1324 that Grand Master DeMolay had appointed him to succeed to the Grand Mastership. While there is no proof that Larmenius was the lawful successor to DeMolay, this circumstance demonstrates an immediate attempt to preserve the Templar organization from the outset, whether legal or not.

Third, as mentioned thousands of the Templars were dispersed throughout Europe. A great number of them were skilled craftsmen. Many had much experience as Masons and in designing and building fortifications. Many had learned their skills in the East and were more advanced than many of the European workmen.

Masonic tradition again reports that a great number of these survivors sought a sanctuary within the Freemason's companies with whom the Order had been closely connected since the Crusades. (19)

Further theories have been pursued whereby surviving Templars followed Pierre d'Aumont, Provincial Grand Master of Auvergne, to Scotland where he was elected Grand Master of the Temple and later moved to Sweden. Baron Von Hund selected this account upon which to base his claim that Freemasonry was founded upon Templary through "The Rite of Strict Observance". We have mentioned "The Order of Christ" in Portugal. Finally, there is the theory that a number of Templars joined the Knights of St. John and transmitted their customs and ceremonies under the cover of that organization.

## THE KNIGHTS OF ST. JOHN

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When the armies of the First Crusade captured Jerusalem in 1099 A.D., the Christian community of that city greatly expanded and the small Hospital of St. John was hard pressed to provide for their needs.

Gerard, the Master of the Hospital, completely reorganized his establishment. He secured larger quarters and recruited additional members. Many of the crusaders made substantial contributions to the hospital. New regulations were adopted to govern the organization and these were based on the Augustinian rule for a monastic society. The rules of government were complete down to precise instructions for treatment of the sick. The members took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and adopted a black robe for their habit. The insignia of their order was a white fishtailed cross of eight points to be worn on the left breast. On February 15, 1113, Pope Paschal II placed the Order under his personal protection and the organization prospered.

Raymond du Puy succeeded Gerard as Master in 1118. He also conceived of the need for military defenses against their warlike Moslem neighbours. Securing the approval of King Baldwin II, and of the Patriarch of Jerusalem, the Hospital developed a military arm in order to defend itself against the heathens and soon rivaled the Templar Order in feats of bravery and skill.

In later years, while the Templars defended the right in battle, the Hospitallers maintained the left of the line.

However, until the end of their active existence as a fighting force on the Island of Malta in 1798, their initial concern and attention was directed toward their function as a hospital.

When the Order of St. John assumed its military role, Raymond du Puy added a regulation for their conduct which included the following admonition, "... and to practice all of the other moral and religious virtues; so that, inflamed with charity, they shall not fear to take the sword in hand, and to expose themselves with prudence, temperance and energy, to every kind of danger, for the defense of Jesus Christ and of the sacred cross, in the cause of justice and in that of the widow and orphans". The Chivalric Freemason of today has subscribed to these identical sentiments.

In 1187, Jerusalem was captured by the Saracens and in May 1291, the remnants of the Christian armies were finally driven from Acre, the last stronghold of the Crusaders in the Holy Land.

The headquarters of the Knights of St. John was moved to Margate, where they had maintained a hospital, and later to Acre, the last stronghold of the Christian forces in the Holy Land. Finally, in May 1291, the remnants of the Christian armies were driven from Acre.

The Hospitallers, and the Templars took ship to Cyprus where they remained for a number of years.

The Teutonic Knights, composed exclusively of German Nobles, went to Prussia and were given all lands to the East they could conquer from the Infidels.

The Knights of St. John secured reinforcements and financial aid from their Priorities in Europe. They purchased ships and began to patrol the Mediterranean Sea. They very successfully opposed the Moslem pirates and slavers that infested the shipping lanes and opened the sea routes for peaceful trade and pilgrimages.

Desiring a home of their own, the Hospitallers attacked and took the Island of Rhodes, and occupied it on August 15, 1310. Improving the fortifications of the island and the harbour facilities, the Order continued to police the sea lanes of the area. At this period of their existence they acquired the name of Knights of Rhodes.

When the Templars were suppressed in 1312, a great amount of their property was turned over to the Knights of Rhodes.

In 1320, the Order of St. John was reorganized into 8 divisions, or languages, with one of the principal officers in charge of each country. These were: The Grand Commander, Provence; the Grand Marshal, Auvergne; the Grand Hospitaller, France; the Grand Admiral, Italy; the Grand Conservator, Aragon; the Grand Bailiff, Germany; the Grand Chancellor, Castile; and the Grand Turcopolier, England. The Grand Master always resided at the headquarters, at this time, Rhodes.

In 1522 the Turkish Sultan, Suleiman II, the Magnificent, attacked the Island of Rhodes with 400 ships and 140,000 men. After valiant defense for 6 months and finally reduced to starvation, they were compelled the Knights to surrender. Because of their valiant and knightly conduct during the hostilities, the Hospitallers were permitted to withdraw from the island with all the honours of war. The Knights sailed to the Island of Candia (Crete) and many returned to their European preceptories.

Emperor Charles V of Spain granted the Island of Malta to the Order in 1530, as a sovereign state, under his dominion. The order then changed its name to "The Sovereign Order of Knights of Malta".

They again took up their quest of securing the sea lanes of the Mediterranean. Their activities included attacking Turkish ships and freeing Christian galley slaves. This was objectionable to Suleiman II and, regretting his former generosity toward the Knights, attacked the Island of Malta. The battle raged for 4 months in 1561 and after half of the Knights had been slain, and reinforcements reached them from Europe, the Turks withdrew, having lost 25,000 men who were killed in the enterprise.

For the next 200 years the seagoing Knights maintained patrol on the Mediterranean Sea. When the French Revolution occurred in the 1780's, the Order sided with the French Monarchy. Napoleon took control of the island in 1798 and ejected the Knights. England gained control of the island in 1814 by the terms of the Treaty of Paris.

WHAT REALLY MATTERS !

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While the foregoing brief account provides perhaps interesting lines of research, it should again strongly be emphasized that insufficient evidence or proof is available in order to establish the possibility of a direct link between the old Chivalric Orders and the Masonic Higher Degrees.

To avoid any misunderstanding, it must be stressed therefore, that whenever our ritual states that "Masonic Tradition reports ..." such statement is not meant to signify to us that the events, portrayed or referred to in the ceremonies which they allude to, are historically true.

This is not the main point.

What really matters to us, is of a different nature.

As a subject of comparison, we should remember that the truly religious man will not be worried to enquire whether the Bible, the Koran or the Vedas, etc. have a historical value or fully match the findings of scientific research.

Nor will he waste his time trying to discover documents and other evidence concerning the birth, life and death of Moses, Christ or Muhammed.

The true believer will instead base his religious conduct on faith. He will concentrate his reflections on the spiritual and moral teachings of his religion, and make use of them as the guide and rule in his life.

Similarly, in Craft Masonry, any wise Brother will know that he should not look upon the story of the building of King Solomon's Temple nor upon the Masonic ritual, as a true account of historically established facts, nor will he start digging as a stupid archeologist on and about Mount Moriah in order to try recovering the lost Master's word.

Using a distinctive method of teaching, which it has in common with the Mysteries of Ancient Egypt and Greece, Freemasonry conveys a spiritual message, through its solemn ceremonies, veiled in allegories and symbols, meant to address the heart rather than the intellect, and which in order to be transmitted properly require from its recipients personal participation, patience and perseverance.

Likewise again, in the Higher Degrees, the ritual is built upon legendary and poetic epics, the moral and spiritual content of which, is much more important for Masons than any presumed facts, upon which the ceremonies may have been based.

The Higher Degrees rituals span a long period of Human history, covering episodes some of which are supposed to have taken place thousands of years ago, others which occurred during the Crusades, and still other which provide the legendary link between Knights Templar and Speculative Masonry.

The Masonic ritual in the Higher Degrees, performed like a theatre play, with each actor memorizing his part, reinforced by attractive music, the use of dazzling costumes, elaborate paraphernalia, fantastic decorations and dramatic light effects, where the unprepared, ignorant candidate is himself part of the cast, and is made to play a central role in the performance, greatly contributes in creating that favourable emotional climate whereby the initiate is most likely to best feel and understand the secret message which each degree is meant to convey.

I do not believe like R.F. Gould that such decorum is likely to impress only upon such particular bent of the mind as is proper to the French "which we know to be volatile, imaginative and decidedly not conservative in their instincts,

loving glory and distinction..." and " very eager to introduce mysterious ceremonies ... " (20)

I had occasion to visit the Rose-Croix Chapter in Dublin, Ireland and see its fantastic Gothic stalls, carved from solid oak, the stained glass windows and the rows of banners. I also was taken there in the Grand Royal Arch Temple which is entirely built in Egyptian style.

Surely this proves that this phenomenon is not limited to France or some Latin countries.

The most extravagant Masonic reconstructions of Egyptian and Greek Temples are probably located in the United States, where degree work is conducted in Hollywood style, using all possible stage effects, and with a number of participants that is only possible in America ...

In opposition to Craft Lodge ritual, which is as simple and stately as the Gothic style of Medieval Masonry, so is the ritual in the Higher Degrees as rich, varied and ornate as 18th century Baroque Architecture.

Truth is one but can be reached from many sides., Craft Masonry, Scottish Rite and York Rite are like different roads leading to the same place.

Masonic ceremonies have but one aim: to maintain our enthusiasm, to excite our intellectual curiosity, and to awaken our reflections, in order to help us to understand and assimilate those important spiritual truths and moral virtues, which extend beyond the grave, beyond time and space, through the boundless realms of eternity ...

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- 1 "Beyond the Craft" by Keith B. Jackson, 1982, Lewis Masonic, Shepperton, Middlesex.
  - 2 "A bridge to Light" by Rex R. Hutchinson, 32nd K.:C.:C.:H.:., Supreme Council of the A.: & A.:S.:R.:., Washington, D.C., 1988, Electric City Printing Company, Anderson, South Carolina.
  - 3 "Clausen's commentaries on morals and dogma" by Henry C. Clausen, Supreme Council of the A.: & A.:S.:R.:., Washington, D.C., 1983, Neyenesh Printers, San Diego, California.
  - 4 "Les Ducs sous l'Acacia, ou les premiers pas de la Franc Maconnerie Francaise, 1725-43", par Pierre Chevalier, 1964, Librairie Philosophique Vrin, Paris.
  - 5 Charles Radclyffe, Earl of Derwentwater (1693-1746) was an illegitimate grandson of King Charles II. Cfr. La Franc-Maconnerie en France, des origines a 1815, 1908, Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, Paris. Slatkine Reprint 1985 Paris. see pp. 109-151 chapter on Charles Radclyffe.
  - 6 The Duke of Richmond, Duc d'Aubigny, was also an illegitimate grandson of King Charles II and was Grand Master of the Premier Grand Lodge in 1724/25. Accordingly the Duke of Richmond and Charles Radclyffe were cousins. Cfr. Le Mystere du Chevalier Ramsay, par Eliane Brault, 1973, Editions du Prisme, Paris, p.81.
  - 7 Transactions of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge, 1934, Volume 47, p.77
  - 8 Bibliotheque Nationale, Col.J. de Fleury, Paris, Volume 84, p.122
  - 9 Two letters from Ramsay to Cardinal Fleury, Archives du Ministere des Affaires Etrangeres, 1308, Fos 211-212.
  - 10 "Ordre hospitalier et militaire de Saint-Lazare de Jerusalem." cfr. Larousse du XXe siecle, vol.4, p.373.
  - 11 Ramsay was for some time tutor to the Prince of Turenne, Duke of Bouillon and published a "History of Turenne". The Duke granted him a pension and gave him a country house, where Ramsay spent the last years of his life.
  - 12 "The Temple and the Lodge" by Michael Baigent & Richard Leigh, 1989, Jonathan Cape, London. p.194
  - 13 Cfr. "La Franc-Maconnerie Templiere et Occultiste" by Rene Le Forestier, 1987, La Table d'Emeraude, Paris.
  - 14 Lord Clifford of Chudleigh, related by marriage to Radclyffe.
  - 15 The Earl of Kilmarnock, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Scotland, 1742-43.
  - 16 "The Temple and the Lodge" ibid. p. 197

- 17 "The York of Freemasonry, a History and Handbook" by Frederick G.Speidel, 1978, approved by the General Grand Chapter, Royal Arch Masons International, Press of Oxford Orphanage, Raleigh, North Carolina. p.56-61
- 18 Ibid. "The Temple and the Lodge" pp.1-13
- 19 "Born in Blood" by John J.Robinson, 1989, M. Evans & Co. New York. The author tells how Knights Templar, fleeing arrest and death, were accepted by Freemasons in Britain. Bro. J. Robinson is an amateur historian and a member of the Southern California Research Lodge.
- 20 "History of Freemasonry" by R.F Gould, 1931, London.