

Some Royal Arch Terms Examined

COMPANION: From the Latin "cum" and "paths" and means bread, or sharer of one's bread. It alludes to the custom of taking bread together as a pledge of friendship. It is an important observance in the Christian Church. In the East a similar custom was to partake of salt, salt being a precious commodity. Thus "Companions" are those who have partaken of bread and are thus bound in the most sacred bonds of friendship.

SOJOURNER: Originally from the Latin and passing through old French, the word comes to us with the meaning of "one making a short or temporary stay." Man is a Sojourner on this Earth, because, no matter how many years old he is, he still has to die and this world is not his permanent home. The three Sojourners in the R.A. Degree represent the threefold nature of Man, namely the physical, the intellectual and the spiritual (the J.S., the S.S. and the P.S.).

CATENARIAN ARCH: When a chain is held by two ends it falls in a definite form which, when inverted, makes a catenarian arch, from the Latin "catena," "a chain. It is called the catenarian curve and will stand independent of any collateral aid whatever. In the R.A. Degree, the two columns which support this arch are figuratively formed by the Companions on the N. and S. sides. The upper ends of these columns are the two Scribes, who represent the cope or pad stones into which the ends of the arch fit. The stones of the arch itself are represented by the three Principals, which by their form and position bind together the whole structure. This teaches us that it is only by all persons, submitting cheerfully and with reverence to the properly constituted authorities, that stability and firmness can be given to any group of individuals

SYMBOLISM OF THE CHAIN: All the Freemasons upon the surface of the Earth form one chain. Every member is a link of it and should ever strive with the true hand of a brother to strengthen it. No wavering doubt should break it. None would be shut out from it as it is taught in every Lodge. What an encouraging thought it is for the newly initiated brother to find himself at once surrounded with the light arising from this great chain. This chain can be no fetter for him, for the hands of his companions prove the contrary.

THE LIGHTS: The lights are six in number. The three greater lights form the large triangle, which has always been the symbol of the Almighty. The lesser, smaller lights allude to the history of Israel, in the patriarchal (starting with Abraham), mosaical (starting with Moses) and the prophetic (starting with Amos.) The large triangle is divided into four smaller triangles which are emblematic of the four divisions of the Craft, namely E.A., F.C., M.M. and R.A. An analysis of the lights shows the following: 4 sets of 3 angles of 60° each equal 720°. 720° equals 8 angles each of 90°. These 8 angles form a double square, a parallelepipedon, and this is the form of a Lodge. The double square is found among the ancients and is the ground plan of temples such as those of Solomon and Zerubbabel; those in Egypt and many other places in the Orient. [It should also be noted that the pedestal in a Royal Arch Chapter is a double square.]

THE TRIPLE TAU: It is of interest to note that the apron of a Master of a Lodge has three Taus; however they are separate, thus showing that the Master has not yet the knowledge of joining them together, which makes for "wholeness."

SCEPTRE: Before the three Principals ascend the steps, they each pick up a sceptre, a symbol of sovereign authority and justice. There is almost no reference I can find which explains its origin.

The last time I remember one being used in its literal sense was at the Coronation of Elizabeth II, which tells you when I went to school. But research can lead one to the strangest places and this line led me to New Mexico or New Spain, as it was called at that time and to two gifts presented to the Pueblo Indians by the King of Spain and Abraham Lincoln. The Pueblos came under the protection of the Spanish throne in 1573 and in 1620 the then King presented to each governor of the independent settlements, a mahogany cane tipped with solid silver as a symbol of their authority. In 1863, Abraham Lincoln, in appreciation of the Pueblos neutrality during the Civil War, presented each governor with a silver tipped cane engraved with the name A. Lincoln. Every January to this day, each ruler, and I could substitute the word Principal, receives these two sceptres from his predecessor, for the period of one year, when someone else has been elected and installed in his stead. Which only confirms the universality of the symbols of our Craft.

The more one researches the origins of the R.A. Degree, the more you realize that no one agrees on anything. The first printed reference to the term Royal Arch is forthcoming in a newspaper, Faulkner's Dublin Journal in an account of a Masonic procession in Younghall, County Cork, December 27th 1743, when the Master of Lodge 21 was preceded by:

"...the Royal Arch, carried by two Excellent Masters."

The inclusion of the term, Excellent Masters, does incline us to the inference that the procession was one of Royal Arch Masons.

Also, from the French Rite in 1860, comes the question:

"Whence comes the Arch?"
Answer: "From the Rainbow."

Probably the allusion in question is a reference to the book of Genesis in which, following the flood, the rainbow is given as a token of Gods' covenant with Man. The cavern (arch) and the rainbow are among the symbols illustrating the French Rite of the 1760 period.

Ex. Comp. Colin Heap
Kitchener Chapter 117 October 4, 2007

Sources

Macoy and Oliver Dictionary of Freemasonry, New York 1871
Faulkner's Dublin Journal, County Cork, Ireland Dec. 27, 1743