

Royal Arch degree conferred solely upon actual Past Masters of lodges

Companion Harris has settled down to the work of reviewing and does not need to travel outside his bailiwick for pointers. His fourth is an able and entertaining report and includes Canada for 1906. He gives us courteous notice to the extent of three pages, much of it quotation.

Under Illinois, he deduces from a quotation in Companion Warvelle's report that under the English Constitution the Royal Arch degree is conferred solely upon actual Past Masters of lodges.

Whatever the practice may have been in the auld lang syne there is no half-way house now between the Master Mason and the Royal Arch in England. That old, old story, which in our Masonic callow youth most of us believed, viz., that "no one in ancient times could receive the Royal Arch degree unless he had previously presided in the lodge as Master," was apparently taken from the knowledge that in a few of the earlier lodges in England, and occasionally in Ireland, that practice was followed and the Royal Arch was regarded as a "Chair degree." Modern research has shown however, that it was by no means universal but was given under lodge authority to the Master Mason as the completion or complement of what he had already received. That Ramsay, its reputed inventor, Dermott, Dunckerley or any other of the old improvers ever intended the Royal Arch to be confined to Past Masters has not yet been made clear by evidence, but when Webb and his American contemporaries set about to fabricate their system and "borrowed" the Past Master degree, the incident was seized upon as an argument and support for its introduction. That he might round off the mystical number seven, the ingenious Webb invented that pretty anachronism the Most Excellent Master and the American system, "a thing of shreds and patches" is there since and will doubtless continue, to shed lustre on the memory of the great ritual remodeler.

England's system, in our humble opinion, is the purest. There will be many to demur, but bear in mind the view is shared by numerous students on this side of the pond. The Master Mason there can apply direct to the Royal Arch Chapter, which is plainly the continuation and end of his knowledge. The Mark degree which is, admittedly, explanatory of the Fellow Craft, is under a distinct government and is wholly optional. The "Past" Master is in its proper place in the blue lodge, and is the degree conferred upon an installed Master. The M. E. M. being a purely American product, and of doubtful origin, meaning or claim, is, of course, unknown.

There are many in England who, like unto their transatlantic cousins, hanker after mystery carefully concealed in the guise of degrees, titles and queer adornment, but they are provided for in the side shows known as allied rites or some equally convenient and alluring nomenclature. There is no connection with the body proper which is now as it was declared in 1813, "Pure Ancient Masonry" — Entered Apprentice, the Fellow Craft and the Master Mason, including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch."

Sources:

Proceedings of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Canada at the annual convocation, 1907, report on Foreign Correspondence — MAINE