

The Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of New Zealand



THE CEREMONY OF ACKNOWLEDGE-  
MENT

THE EXCELLENT MASTER DEGREE

## A Handbook for Excellent Masters

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This handbook has been produced by The Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of New Zealand to supplement the Ceremony of Acknowledgement, usually known as the Excellent Masters Degree, as a guide to understanding the intent and importance of the degree.

The Grand Lodge of New Zealand recognises six degrees (Rule 71 of the Book of Constitution) the first three of which form the three degrees of Craft Masonry.

1. The Entered Apprentice, or First, Degree
2. The Fellowcraft, or Second, Degree
3. The Master Mason, or Third Degree

All business in the Lodge takes place in the Entered Apprentice (First) Degree and, therefore, a Candidate who has been admitted a Freemason is able to attend regular meetings. A Craft Lodge is governed by the Master and his two Wardens. A Lodge is part of a District, governed by a District Grand Master. A District is part of a Division, governed by a Divisional Grand Master. Free Masonry in New Zealand is governed by a Grand Master.

4. Mark Master Mason
5. Excellent Master
6. Royal Arch Mason

Unlike a Craft Lodge, however, the business of a Royal Arch Chapter takes place in the Royal Arch Degree and a candidate who has been Advanced to the Honourable Degree of Mark Master Mason, or has been Acknowledged as an Excellent Master, cannot attend in the Chapter until he has been Exalted to the Degree of the Royal Arch. Each Royal Arch Chapter is governed by a First Principal, assisted by a Second Principal and a Third Principal. Each Chapter is part of a District, governed by a Grand Superintendent. A District is part of a Division, overseen by a Grand Principal (Depute First Grand Principal, Second Grand Principal and Third Grand Principal). The Order is governed by a First Grand Principal.

Again, unlike a Craft Lodge, in which all ceremonies take place in the Lodge, the Mark Master Mason degree is conducted in a Lodge of Mark Master Masons, the Excellent Master Degree is conducted in a Lodge of Excellent Masters, but the Royal Arch Degree is conducted in a Chapter of Royal Arch Masons.

## THE CEREMONY

Having completed the degree, there may be a tendency to regard the Excellent Degree as a transitional degree creating a link between the Mark Master Degree and the Royal Arch Degree. Indeed you were informed of this when, in the Address, you were told that the ceremony “is but a preliminary to your Exaltation ...” Taken alone, however, this understates the value of the degree and the complex and deeper spiritual lessons it contains.

The scene for the degree is set by the first lines from the book of Ezra:

*Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.*

How did this come about?

In the allegory of this degree we move ahead in time to 470 years after the dedication of King Solomon’s Temple and we hear of the preparations made for the return from captivity of the Jews. During this time the Chosen People were cut off from their spiritual home and many were corrupted by the “worldly diversions” that Babylon represented. However

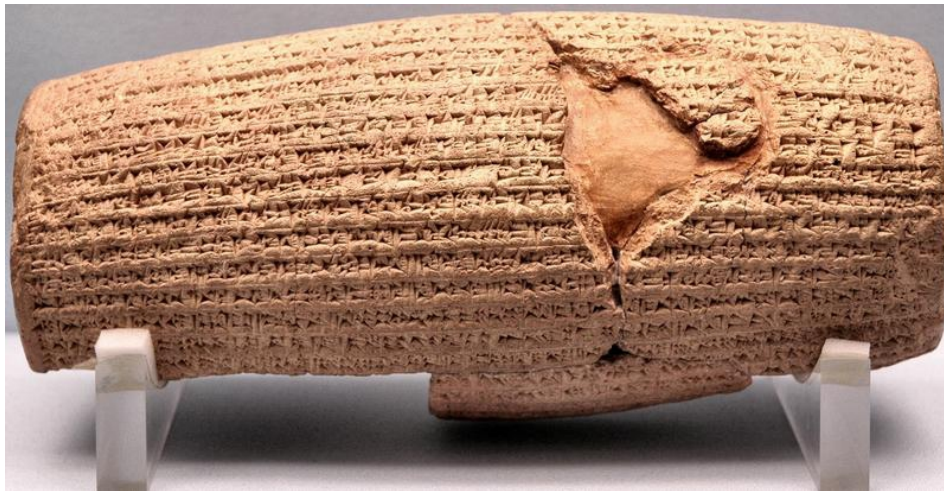
others, the builders, yearned to return home and to a life more connected to their God.

At the time of the Excellent Master Degree allegory the Babylonians had been conquered by Persia and Cyrus, the first Emperor of Persia, had taken control of the greatest military force the world had yet seen and was about to establish the Persian Empire. The building of the Second Temple in Jerusalem was about to commence, and the mystery of one of the great allegories of Craft Freemasonry was about to be solved.

Cyrus was a minor prince of an unremarkable Persian tribe who took control and founded an Empire which stood for over 200 years before eventually being defeated by Alexander the Great. He was reputed to be a statesman and humanitarian, as well as a brilliant general, who eschewed the “scorched earth” policies of his Assyrian and Babylonian predecessors and who conciliated his former enemies by forging peaceful ties with them. Not only did he agree to allow the Jews to return to their spiritual home, but he restored much of the treasure which the forces of Nebuchadnezzar had removed from the Temple.

According to our legend the Jews had suffered sufficiently and wished to ensure that only men descended from those taken into captivity be allowed to work on the new Temple. They established a Grand Lodge in Babylon where they had been held captive and to test all those wishing to return to Jerusalem and, if found worthy, to grant them signs, tokens and words by which they could prove to those working on the new Temple that they were worthy and ready to assist that great work. In the ceremony the candidate represents one who has requested such permission to journey to Jerusalem with the passwords and signs gained from qualified members. His journey will represent a spiritual rebirth of the Jews.

The Decree of Cyrus is a fascinating document that could be thought of as a prototype for a declaration of some human rights, much as those written 2,500 years later, in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It granted permission for a captured people to return to their native land, taking with them their sacred treasures, and freedom to practice their religion.



A cylindrical copy of the Decree of Cyrus (British Museum, London)

However, the Decree was not restricted to just the Jews. It extended to other races taken into captivity by the forces of Nebuchadnezzar including men of Tyre, close neighbours of Judea. A great caravan of more than 50,000 men, women and children set out to travel the 1,250km journey with 1,400 horses, mules, camels and asses and carrying 5,400 vessels of gold and silver which had been looted from Solomon's Temple. There was, apparently, a considerable amount of treasure subscribed by those who chose to remain in Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar is of Masonic interest. King of Babylon, destroyer of Jerusalem, and captor of more than 40,000 Jews, he was one of the great rulers of ancient times and an enigma. A great general, he ruled Babylon for over 40 years and during that time transformed large areas of desert through irrigation and promoted trade by building harbours on the Persian Gulf. Babylon became a mighty fortress and its architecture, palaces, bridges and landscaping, especially the famed hanging gardens, caused the Rev Dr James Anderson to describe Nebuchadnezzar in his Constitutions as the "Grand Master Mason". Apparently the cost of these works severely strained the Babylonian economy and the kingdom survived only another 24 years after the death of Nebuchadnezzar when it fell to Cyrus.

The central part of the ceremony introduces the candidate to a symbolic representation of the predecessor of King Solomon's Temple—the Tabernacle first erected by Moses at the direction of God.

The Degree opens with the Candidate listening to one of the more powerful prayers in all our ceremonies and which foreshadows some of the concepts he will encounter later. For example it recalls the signs sent

to Moses (the burning bush) drawing a metaphor about love and devotion; and it refers to the destruction of the first temple and the building of the second as a metaphor of our response to sin. He is given a short history of the reason for the degree and is then taken through an Obligation which refers only to the secrets and their transmission.

At each of the veils, representing the veils or curtains used by Moses, he is given a sign, explained by a reading from Exodus, related to the signs given by God so that Moses would be able to convince the Israelites that he had indeed spoken with God. The sign is emphasised and then further explained by the Captain of the Veil who also communicates a token and a word. The symbolism of the colour of the veil is explained to him. These signs and words parallel the situation which the returning Jews found themselves with the circumstances of their predecessors during their search for a spiritual home.

The central theme of the passing through three of the four veils is the discovery of important lessons about life. The coloured veils are used as allegories during the passing.

Thus the candidate progresses through the Blue, Purple, Scarlet veils but does not pass through the fourth or White veil.

The veils each are symbolic in several ways.

**Blue:** a symbol of air, one of the ancient basic elements; a colour that represents truth, honour and friendship; a symbol of royalty; and, being the colour of the heavens, representing the abode of the Supreme Being. There is a Biblical reference—*On several occasions Moses was commended to wear blue. "Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue: ... that ye may remember, and do all my Commandments, and be holy unto your God."* (Numbers XV 38). All Freemasons will appreciate the reference to a "ribband of blue".

**Purple:** a symbol of water another of the four ancient basic elements; a symbol of unity (of Red and Blue); the colour of mourning; and a symbol of wealth (because of the huge number of murex—a small shellfish—required to extract sufficient dye to stain just one imperial toga).

**Scarlet:** a symbol of fire, yet another of the ancient basic elements; the colour of blood denoting life, action, cheerfulness, courage, energy and

zeal; the colour of war denoting sacrifice, sorrow and suffering; and a symbol of royalty.

**White:** a symbol of earth, the last of the four ancient basic elements; the universal symbol for purity and innocence.

The import of the colours is that they represent qualities we expect all freemasons to possess.

The words communicated to the candidate at the Blue and Purple Veils have a special significance to Freemasons. *“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, To devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, And in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship”*(Exodus 31:1-6) and *“And I, behold, I have given with him Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan: and in the hearts of all that are wise hearted I have put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded thee; The tabernacle of the congregation, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is thereupon, and all the furniture of the tabernacle* (Exodus 31:6-7) *And he hath put in his heart that he may teach, both he, and Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. Them hath he filled with wisdom of heart, to work all manner of work, of the engraver, and of the cunning workman, and of the embroiderer, in blue, and in purple, in scarlet, and in fine linen, and of the weaver, even of them that do any work, and of those that devise cunning work”* (Exodus 34:34-35). The aware Mason will recognise elements of the description of Hiram Abiff in these descriptions.

Old Testament considerations suggest that the Blue veil refers to the tribe of Dan; the Purple veil to the tribe of Reuben; the Scarlet veil to the tribe of Ephraim; and the White veil to the tribe of Judah.

These colours, often be seen as the grounds in the Royal Arch Banners, can symbolise the Eagle (Blue), Man (Purple), Ox (Scarlet) and Lion (White) and they also have astrological implications: Blue—Scorpio (considered the astrological equivalent of the Eagle); Purple—Aquarius (the water carrier—man); Scarlet—Taurus (the bull); and White—Leo (the lion).



The varied interpretations of the veils have one thing in common: they represent our spiritual journey through life, the destination of which is re-union with our Maker. The degree teaches us that we must persevere through hardship in order to 'return home' and that any journey requires dedication, perseverance and preparation. It shows us that in every journey there are always lessons to be learned and that the lessons are not necessarily obvious.

The degree is one of preparation, and distillation—preparing oneself in readiness for the next step and sloughing off the dross gained from a life of excess.

The degree, therefore, is symbolic of removing the influence of the land of Babylon, a land of excess and of the flesh so that we may prepare ourselves the long return journey to our home. It marks the start of a spiritual journey—a journey which is not yet complete. The candidate is left, figuratively, standing before the white veil—not yet permitted, or 'perfect' enough, to enter—an entry which can only take place upon arrival at Jerusalem.

The candidate therefore progresses toward the new Grand Lodge at Jerusalem and will be ready to take his next test to see if he has perfected himself sufficiently to take the final test of Exaltation to the Holy Royal Arch Degree in which he will learn how to be a prince and ruler of his own life as well as an exemplar to others.

## THE EXCELLENT DEGREE

By M E Comp A B Christensen GZ March, 1954.

The Excellent Degree forms, as it were, a bridge between Craft and Royal Arch Freemasonry, the link between the physical and the spiritual realms. For Craft Freemasonry concentrates its attention on the perfection of character, of which King Solomon's Temple is the symbol while in Royal Arch Freemasonry we are led into vastly higher conception of our duties to each other, and our relationship to the Creator a conception which comes much easier when we have developed the finer attributes of character to a satisfactory level. Thus it is in the building of the Second Temple that the expected revelation may materialise, and it is in the opening prayer of this Degree that we are given a direct clue as to the nature and design of our work in the Royal Arch. " Since sin has destroyed within us the first temple of purity and innocence do Thou guide and assist us in building a second temple by reformation, so that when the veil of this earthly tabernacle shall be drawn aside we may be received into that sanctuary where Thou livest and reignest for ever." In other words, restore to us the awareness of God that humanity once possessed. This suggests much which I cannot amplify at this stage, as it would be anticipating developments which must be left to the Candidate's later on.

Moreover, just as this Degree illustrates a period of change, not only in the history of the period on which the ritual is based; but from a Masonic point of view as presenting a new line of thought and conception of the future, so might it serve to remind us that often in life we arrive at a point where we are compelled to choose a definite course - the result of which may abide with us during the rest of our lives - a momentous decision must be made, affecting not only our own future, but perhaps that of many other; and how many of us are capable of choosing wisely and carefully, and unprejudiced by self-interest and other influences, and having a proper regard for the result of our own decisions on the lives of others. And so the Degree suggests that we should neglect no opportunity of fitting ourselves to make such decisions, so that we may be cap-

able of exercising intelligent judgment, with due regard to the factors involved.

Let me remind you of the injunction in the final charge , which unfortunately is so seldom heeded - " To acquire such a degree of knowledge and information as will enable you to discharge with propriety the various duties incumbent upon you and so preserve unsullied the title we now confer of Excellent Master."

Very often however, it so occurs that momentous decisions are made without the slightest realisation of their far-reaching consequences or importance and in the Excellent Degree we have an illustration of one of the greatest of these in the decree of Cyrus. "If" it had not rained on the eve of Waterloo and thus prevented Napoleon from getting his artillery into action for hours after the battle started, how different may have been the history of Europe!. "If" Cyrus had not made his great decree and liberated the Jews, how different may have been the history of the world. For the foundation of all that represents modern civilisation, and what we are today, is the direct result of his decision, not only to liberate them, but to charge the Jews to rebuild the house of God at Jerusalem.

If the Jews, with their traditions and strong religious principles, strengthened and regenerated by the lease o life granted them under this dispensation, had not been a ruling force in Palestine at the advent of Jesus, the doctrines of the new and better covenant may have fallen on barren ground, apart from the fact that the event which introduced Christianity to the world may not have come into being at all.

The grand ideal in Masonry, to which all the rest are subsidiary and contributory, is that which represents the soul of man as a holy temple, a dwelling place for the Most High. McBride, in his "Speculative Freemasonry," extends the idea of speculative building from the Individual to society, thus: "The mission of Masonry being the building of the ideal temple, he is a true Mason who works true to the plan of that temple, He has to build himself, and thereby contribute to the building of humanity as a dwelling place for the Divine Presence." The book says, "Know ye not that ye are the Temple of God, and the spirit of God dwelleth within thee."

From the historical point of view, the events of the period depleted in the Excellent Degree clothe it with an importance which should not be under-

estimated. It is through the portals of this Degree, therefore, that we symbolically enter on the path of our spiritual regeneration. It must always be remembered that all references to temples and stones throughout the ritual refer to the individual, not material temples etc; and keeping this constantly in mind, we can easily comprehend the unique symbolism employed, not only to impress us with the important moral and spiritual values they represent, but to enable us to discern the real aim and object of Ancient Freemasonry, of which the Royal Arch is part and parcel, and not a separate institution as is sometimes supposed.

To comprehend more fully the symbolism of Royal Arch Masonry, one must of course acquire some knowledge of that of Craft Masonry first. For obvious reasons I cannot traverse that vast field tonight, and will therefore confine myself strictly to the Excellent Degree.

The Tabernacle scene forms an important part of the ceremony. There is no historical evidence of the erection of a tabernacle, and like many other stories in Freemasonry, it is merely a myth introduced for symbolic purposes. It is not unlikely that some sort of shelter was erected near the Temple ruins to form a meeting place for worship and consultation; and the Altar of Sacrifice, inseparable from all Jewish enterprises, would be erected in the open court, as was usual in any case. In the real Tabernacle the curtains were around the wall, and did not divide it into compartments such as are used in this Degree. And the Holy of Holies was in the West, not the East, as depicted in a Masonic Temple.

As the curtains or veils have been so placed in our Tabernacle in the Chapter room, the symbolism is obviously contained within them and should be considered in two aspects. First, in reference to the symbolism of the veils as a whole, and next to each veil separately.

As a whole, the four veils, constituting four divisions of the Tabernacle, present obstacles to the neophyte in his advance to the most holy place, where the Grand Council sits. He is seeking advancement to that sacred spot that he may receive there his spiritual illumination, and be invested with a knowledge of the true Divine Name or Word. But Masonically this Divine Name or Word is itself only a symbol of Truth, the object, it has often been stated of all a Mason's search and labour. The passage through the veils is, therefore a symbol of trials and difficulties that are en-

countered, and must be overcome, in search of and the acquisition of Truth.

This is the general symbolism; but we are liable to lose sight of it in a great measure when we consider the interpretation of the symbolism of each veil independently of the others, for this principally symbolises the various virtues and attributes which should characterise a good man and Mason. Yet the two symbolisms are closely connected, because the virtues symbolised are those which must necessarily distinguish everyone engaged in the Divine search, and success is impossible without them.

The symbolism as used in the ritual refers to the colours of the veils, and to the miraculous signs of Moses which are described in "Exodus" as having been shown to him to prove his mission as the messenger of Jehovah. The Mosaic sign of the serpent (first veil) was the symbol amongst the ancients of resurrection to life, because the serpent by casting his skin, was supposed continually to renew his youth. It is a symbol here of the loss and recovery of the Word.

In the second veil the Mosaic sign refers to the restoration of the leprous hand to health, a repetition of the allusion to the loss and recovery of the Word.

In the third veil the Mosaic symbol of changing water to blood (or wine as it used to be) bears the same symbolic reference to a change for the better, from a lower to a higher state, from the elemental water in which there is no life to the wine (or blood) which is life itself, from darkness to light. The progress is still onward towards the recovery of that which was lost.

In the fourth veil white is the symbol of purity and appropriately reminds the neophyte, who is now drawing near the close of his search, that it is only by purity of life that he can expect to be found worthy of the reception of Divine Truth. The Great Teacher says "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

The Mosaic signs now cease, and the aspirant, having endured all trials and overcome all obstacles is entitled to receive the reward which he has been seeking.

The children of Israel were carried away into captivity, where they served the King of Babylon, who symbolises the evils lusts of the flesh, for 70 years. It was actually about 52 years, but note the symbolic three score years and ten – or a lifetime which is needed to subjugate the rebellious principles and evils which pervade human nature. Then there always arises a Messiah, a Cyrus if you please as a Hebrew; or a Jesus if you please as a Christian – a time when the edict goes forth that you are free, and a Zerubbabel comes forth to lead back again, to build our Second Temple by reformation.

Therefore, even bearing in mind our belief in the Fatherhood of God and the immortality of the soul, a belief to which all Freemasons must subscribe, let us strive to the limits of our finite powers to fit ourselves for the sublime state which this belief suggests. But no wishful thinking or pious professions will qualify us so a genuine effort to improve ones own nature by acquiring and developing the attributes of character which may lead to this end. Actually the end is purely speculative and of minor importance. The main thing is to give expression to these desirable attributes in practical terms of being and doing, something for somebody. The possession of a few estimable virtues and the passive influence of a blameless life, however creditable they may be, merely connote a negative or static condition, until translated into terms of service; that is what Freemasonry claims from its adherents. For of what use or value is admirable equipment or fine tools if not put to practical or constructive use?

Thus the Excellent Master's Degree depicts that turning point in history where began the system of religion and culture and intellectual progress which represents modern civilisation. Zeal, devotion to duty, loyalty, self-sacrifice and patience, are symbolised in the allegory of this Degree. Read the story carefully in the ritual, together with the full Scriptural references, assisted by a modern commentary translate it into realistic terms, and you will enjoy a greater and finer conception of the Degree than you have hitherto.

## PASSING THE VEILS

## ME Comp. J. P. Glenie PGZ 1978

It is well known that when our Grand Chapter was formed in 1892, the decision was made to adopt the Scottish Tri-gradal system and to incorporate under the control of Grand Chapter, the degrees of Mark Master Mason, Excellent Master and Royal Arch. In coming to this decision the founders looked carefully, not only at the Scottish system, but also at the systems of England and Ireland, all of which were actively represented in New Zealand. English Chapters, as now, worked only the Royal Arch Degree while Ireland controlled in its Chapters both Mark and Royal Arch Degrees, including in the latter a modified veils ceremony. In England, the Mark ceremony was governed, and still is, by a separate Grand Mark Lodge.

The decision made in New Zealand in 1892, was probably a wise one. The country was very young and far from affluent. Population was both limited and scattered and conditions of living by no means as well organised or as easy as in the Old Country. It was therefore very important for the young Grand Chapter to make its road as easy as possible and its degrees attractive to as many Masons as could be done. If Mark and Royal Arch degrees could be conferred by the one body, joining fees and subscriptions would be saved and competition for members might be less acute. Instead of Freemasons having to join both a Chapter and a Mark Lodge to take the degrees, the one subscription in a New Zealand Chapter would cover both and at a time of financial stringency, this no doubt appealed.

It appears that experience over the intervening years has shown the decision to have been a wise one.

We may wonder however why there was then and in general is now, no veils ceremony (our Degree of Excellent Master) in the English system. Researchers have proved that at one stage the ceremony of "Passing the Veils" was reasonably common in England. Old Exposures describe it in some detail and Richard Carlile in particular has set out at some length, the working as he knew it early in the 19th century. The general approach seems to have been rather similar to that used in Ireland, the veils being an appendage rather than a separate degree

It is strange that knowledge of the old English ceremony is so scanty. It seems to have developed in the latter half of the 18th century, at a time

when the Royal Arch degree was gradually coming into its own. Royal Arch became especially popular with the Ancients who apparently saw in it a weapon for making their brand of Masonry more acceptable. The Moderns were much more coy about the degree and while many of them, even their leaders, had taken it privately, officially their Grand Lodge for some time refused any recognition.

The Royal Arch degree gained ground substantially during the latter years of the century and by the time of the Union in 1813, was well established. With the Royal Arch, had come an increasing interest in the ceremony of Passing the Veils though it was never universally in use in England and depended on the whim of the Chapter as well as of the individual.

Occasional references, mostly very sketchy, have been found in the Minutes and Accounts of Chapters in the first half of the 19th century. In A. Q. C., No. 62 (1948), Bros. Hawkyard and Worts quote extracts from the records of three Chapters, showing that between 1818 and 1850, the "Vails" ceremony was in use in Yorkshire, with presumptive evidence of its use in two other Chapters, one in Yorkshire and one in Durham. It would be unlikely that the veils would be completely unknown further South, particularly when they were in common use in Scotland and in Ireland.

I think we may well conclude that the ceremony of Passing the Veils was a feature of the English system before the Union of 1813 but thereafter gradually fell into disuse. It is likely that the middle of the century saw its final demise and by the end of the century, it was long unknown. Indeed the celebrated Masonic Historian, R. F. Gould, in his monumental "History of Freemasonry" dated 1882-1887, makes no mention whatever of the veils. Clearly they were no longer in use in England by that date.

Late in the 19th century, companions of the Beaufort Chapter, No. 103 in Bristol, became concerned at the low ebb of their Chapter and of Royal Arch Masonry in general in Bristol. In casting around for something which would arouse interest, they decided to investigate a reference in their ritual, to the "Passing of the Veils". An approach to the Grand Scribe E for information was fruitless. Grand Chapter knew nothing of the matter, had no information about the ceremony or any indication that it had survived in any English Chapter. A visit to Ireland strangely proved of little



help and ultimately the Chapter had to work out its own ceremonial and equipment.

After some difficulty this was done and a veils ceremony became and still is, a regular feature of the work of the Beaufort Chapter. I have no knowledge that any Chapter in England outside Bristol has ever followed suit in using the veils ceremony. The demonstration which I witnessed in the Essex Installed Principals Chapter in 1976 was an exemplification only and would have required considerable research.

It seems clear that, when the ceremony was originally in use and perhaps reasonably common, there was no question of it being obligatory. Even in Chapters where it was used, candidates took it or not as they saw fit. Sometimes it was a preliminary to the Royal Arch and sometimes taken later than the degree. At times it was taken on the same day as the degree and at other times, days or weeks before or after. Probably it was always conferred in a lodge opened for the purpose, sometimes within a Chapter, sometimes not. Clearly it never became really established as part of the Royal Arch system and when it finally faded out, over a century ago, like the Arab, it simply folded its tent and silently stole away.

## THE EXCELLENT DEGREE OF THE SGRACNZ

RE Comp Gary Kerkin GLec February 2010

The Book of Ezra opens with these lines<sup>1</sup>:

*Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever re-*

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<sup>1</sup> Ezra 1:1-4

*maineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.*

These lines set the scene for the story of the Order of the Royal Arch. The time is some 470 years after the dedication of the Temple of King Solomon and 70 years after the sacking of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. The Babylonians had been conquered by Persia and Cyrus had taken control and the greatest military force the world had yet seen was about to establish the Persian Empire. The building of the Second Temple was about to start, and the mystery of one of the great allegories of Craft Freemasonry was about to be solved.

How did we reach this point? How did we find our way from the allegory of King Solomon's Temple to a brand new story? And why?

The Craft Degrees have informed us about Masonic Philosophy, how it applies to our lives, how we should endeavour to learn more about it, and how it impacts on our spirituality, and it does so by way of instruction, symbolism and allegory. But they leave us with questions and do not pretend to offer answers. Some of these are answered in the Mark Degree but that, as we know, is set in the time of the construction of Solomon's Temple. It tells us how the work force was organised, instructed and managed. It tells us about the quality control necessary for the building of such a structure. But it does not lead us to an answer to that overwhelming question: why the genuine secrets were lost by the death of just one man when clearly three men knew them.

Laurence Gardner in "The Shadow of Solomon"<sup>2</sup> writes that when the Third Degree was developed there was already a possible ceremony which was ignored—the Royal Arch.

We can speculate as to what this degree may have contained but it is possible that it dealt with the genuine secrets and their relationship to the basic philosophy and its extension to our spirituality. Again I am speculating but it is likely that, since the loss of the genuine secrets was annexed to the newly developed Third Degree, the story was changed to deal with the recovery of them. It would be a nice touch to have it set

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<sup>2</sup> Laurence Gardner "The Shadow of Solomon" Harper Element 2005 ISBN 13 978 0 00 720761 9, ISBN 10 0 00 720761 1, p163.

much later in time, and in a similar temple, and what better story existed than that of the destruction of Solomon's Temple and the subsequent building of a temple on the same site?

So we arrive at a situation where we have to describe the transition over a period of 470 years to a new time and a new cast of characters.

This is achieved in the Excellent Degree.

It is a curious degree because although the ceremony is presented in a Lodge of Excellent Masters unlike other Lodges there is no Chair Degree associated with it. In our ritual it serves only to make that transition between the Mark Degree (and, perforce, the Third Degree) and the Royal Arch Degree and yet it incorporates some very significant lessons.

It does not exist in the English ritual (which has a Royal Arch Degree only, the Mark Degree falling under a separate and distinct jurisdiction), although there are records of working a ceremony of "Passing The Veils". There is no separate Excellent Degree in the Irish ritual but there is a ceremony similar to the Passing the Veils as a prologue to their Royal Arch Degree. Other jurisdictions, such as those in North America, do not use it. It is only formalised in the ritual of the Scottish Constitution which has been adopted by us and some other Constitutions. ME Comp J P Glenie PGZ writes<sup>3</sup>

*'In coming to this decision the founders [of the SGRACNZ] looked carefully, not only at the Scottish system, but also at the systems of England and Ireland, all of which were actively represented in New Zealand ... the decision made ... in 1892, was probably a wise one. Population was both limited and scattered and the conditions of living by no means as well organised or as easy as in the Old Country. It was therefore very important for the young Grand Chapter to make its road as easy as possible and its degrees attractive to as many Masons as could be done. If Mark and Royal Arch degrees could be confirmed by the one body, joining fees and subscriptions would be saved and competition for members would be less acute.'*

This was, no doubt, a sound, pragmatic reason for adopting the Scottish system with its three degrees, but gives no credence to philosophical

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<sup>3</sup> "Passing the Veils", ME Comp JP Glenie PGZ, The Research Chapter of NZ No 93, Transactions, Vol IV No 12, June 1978, p161.

considerations and the necessity of establishing a good understanding of the allegories.

Glenie comments that knowledge of the old English ceremony is scanty; in fact he thought it “strange”. He writes:

*‘Researchers have proved that at one stage the ceremony of “Passing the Veils” was reasonably common in England. Old Exposures describe it in some detail and Richard Carlile in particular has set out at some length, the working as he knew it early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The general approach seems to have been rather similar to that used in Ireland, the veils being an appendage rather than a separate degree.’*

Later he writes:

*‘I think we may well conclude that the ceremony of Passing the Veils was a feature of the English system before the Union of 1813 but thereafter fell into disuse. It is likely that the middle of the century saw its final demise and by the end of the century, it was long unknown.’*

Clearly those concerned with the ritual of the newly founded Grand Chapter thought it desirable to adopt the concept of the Excellent Master degree, rather than the prologue to the Irish Royal Arch degree.

The scene of the Excellent Master Degree is in Babylon and takes place in a tabernacle. ME Comp Ross Hepburn, then Grand Superintendent of the Canterbury District writes<sup>4</sup>:

*“By ‘Tabernacle’ is usually understood the elaborate portable sanctuary which Moses erected at Sinai, in accordance with Divine instructions, as the place of worship for the Hebrew tribes during and after the wilderness wanderings.*

*“But modern criticism has revealed the fact that this is to be carefully distinguished from the much simpler tent bearing the same name, and likewise associated with Moses.”*

The specifications for the Tabernacle erected by Moses are described in Exodus starting at chapter 26 verse 13.

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<sup>4</sup> “The Excellent Master Degree”, RE Comp R Hepburn G Supt, The Auckland Chapter of Research No 93, Transactions, Vol 1, No 3, September 1955, p3.

Moses was instructed to make a tabernacle from ten curtains of fine linen, three dyed blue, purple and scarlet; each 28 x 4 cubits. The curtains were coupled together in two groups of five with loops of blue on the selvedge of one set and taches (buckles or clasps) of gold on the other set which were placed through the loops to couple the two sets to form the tabernacle.

The tabernacle was enclosed in a tent made from eleven curtains of goat's hair each 30 x 4 cubits coupled in a set of 5 and a set of 6 with loops on the edge of a set and taches of brass edge on the edge of the other set which were placed through the loops to form the tent. The 6<sup>th</sup> curtain was doubled in the front of the tabernacle. A covering for the tent was made from the skin of rams died red and a roof of badger skins.

Boards to support the tabernacle were to be made of shittim wood, each board 10 x 2 ½ cubits with tenons and silver sockets. Upright, side, corner and other boards are described in verses 15 to 24 with directions for how they were to be fitted together. Verses 26 to 30 describe the bars (ridge and eaves poles) which supported the tabernacle. Also of shittim wood, they were to be overlaid in gold.

Veils of blue, purple, scarlet and fine twined linen are described in verse 31. They were to be suspended on four pillars of shittim wood overlaid with gold by gold hooks into sockets of silver under the taches of the tabernacle. The "ark of the testimony" was to be placed within the veil which divided the "holy place" from the "most holy [place]". The mercy seat was to be placed upon the ark. Tables were to be placed outside this veil on both the south and north sides of the tabernacle and a candle placed against the south table. A hanging of blue, purple and scarlet was to be made for the door of the tent and supported on pillars of shittim wood overlaid with gold with gold hooks fitted into brass sockets.

This was a very complex structure to be deemed "portable" and as Hepburn indicates, some think a much simpler structure was used by Moses.

The allegory—the play in which our Candidate for the degree takes part, unrehearsed—introduces him into the Lodge as a Jew who wishes to journey to Jerusalem to assist in rebuilding the second temple.

It is worth commenting on the history of that time. There will always be debate as to biblical dates: VE Comp G H Robertson<sup>5</sup> writes that the probable times are:

597 BC    Nebuchadnezzar carried off 800 from Jerusalem

586 BC    Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple, and carried away over 40,000

537 BC    Decree of Cyrus and the first return to Jerusalem

Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, destroyer of Jerusalem, captor of more than 40,000 Jews, was one of the great rulers of ancient times and clearly an enigma. A great general, he ruled Babylon for over 40 years and during that time transformed large areas of desert through irrigation and promoted trade by building harbours on the Persian Gulf. Babylon became a mighty fortress and its architecture, palaces, bridges and landscaping, especially the famed hanging gardens, caused the Rev Dr James Anderson to describe him in his Constitutions as the “Grand Master Mason”. Apparently the cost of these works strained the Babylonian economy and the kingdom survived only another 24 years after the death of Nebuchadnezzar when it fell to Cyrus, the first Emperor of Persia.

Cyrus was a minor prince of an unremarkable Persian tribe who took control and founded an Empire which stood for over 200 years before eventually being defeated by Alexander the Great. He was reputed to be a statesman and humanitarian, as well as a brilliant general, who eschewed the “scorched earth” policies of his Assyrian and Babylonian predecessors and who conciliated his former enemies by forging peaceful ties with them.

The Decree described in the first chapter of the book of Ezra was formulated in his first year as ruler of Babylon and was inscribed on a terra cotta cylinder which supposedly still exists in a museum in Europe<sup>6</sup>. This same article also comments:

*“The part of the Decree, recorded in the Book of Ezra, and the references to it in our Royal Arch ritual, are concerned only with its ef-*

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<sup>5</sup> “The Principals and the Second Temple”, VE Comp G H Robertson, The Auckland Chapter of Research No 93, Transactions, No 12, September 1958, p5.

<sup>6</sup> “Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, Cyrus the Great, and the Emperor Darius”, The Auckland Chapter of Research No 93, Transactions, No 26 June 1963 p9, ‘Contributed by the EDITOR’

*fect upon the Jews, but in justice to Cyrus it should be made clear that it applied to the captives of many races, including Judea's neighbours the men of Tyre."*

The book of Ezra indicates that Zerubbabel led the Jews to Jerusalem<sup>7</sup>:

*'Now these are the children of the province that went up out of the captivity ... Which came with Zerubbabel: Jeshua, Nehemiah, ...'*

The article cited above indicates that a great caravan of more than 50,000 men, women and children set out to travel the 1,250km journey with 1,400 horses, mules, camels and asses and carrying 5,400 vessels of gold and silver which had been looted from Solomon's Temple. There was, apparently, a considerable amount of treasure subscribed by those who chose to remain in Babylon.

Thus commenced the period in which this degree is set, but it was to be nearly 20 years before the construction actually commenced. Zerubbabel was frustrated by those living in and around Jerusalem, particularly the Samaritans, who wished to participate in the building and when denied the opportunity, blocked the start in many ways. It was not until Zerubbabel managed to convince Darius long after the death of Cyrus, in events described in the Book of Esdras and that the opposers were ordered to desist and were forcibly removed if they persisted in frustrating Zerubbabel's plans.

The Degree opens with the Candidate listening to one of the more powerful prayers in all our ceremonies and which foreshadows some of the concepts he will encounter later. For example it recalls the signs sent to Moses (the burning bush) drawing a metaphor about love and devotion; and it refers to the destruction of the first temple and the building of the second as a metaphor of our response to sin. He is given a short history of the reason for the degree and then taken through an Obligation which refers only to the secrets and their transmission.

The play proper commences with his entering a tabernacle requesting permission to travel to Jerusalem to assist in the building of the second temple. He is taken through 3 curtains or veils and given a sign, token and password associated with each one and later is informed that he will

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<sup>7</sup> Ezra 2:1-2

require these to prove to those already in Jerusalem that he is acceptable and has appropriate permissions.

One of the difficulties he will encounter is the form of the room. When he entered prior to his obligation he will have recognised the room as a conventional Lodge with a Master and two Wardens. He will know, from his experience in the ceremony of Advancement to the Degree of Mark Master Mason that part of the action took place in a room that was not a Lodge but rather represented the quarry in which the stones for the building of the temple were prepared. So encountering a room which does not look like a Lodge will not come as a great surprise. But he has not been told what it is supposed to represent. Only later will he perhaps reach the conclusion that it represents a tabernacle because he is informed that when he reaches Jerusalem he will present himself before the tabernacle and claim admission to the Sanhedrin.

At each of the veils he is presented with a reading from Exodus related to the signs given by God so that Moses would be able to convince the Israelites that he had indeed spoken with God. At each stage a particular sign is emphasised and then explained by the Captain of the Veil who also communicates a token and a word. The symbolism of the colour of the veil is explained to him.

At the first veil, the Blue Veil, the ritual calls upon the symbol burning bush and the Candidate hears that Moses was directed to put off his shoes because the ground was holy. This is not the only time he will encounter this directive. He learns, however, that Moses was not convinced by the name or sign that God had given him, pleading that his followers might not believe him. God then showed Moses how his rod would turn into a serpent if he cast it on the ground, and how it would turn back into a rod when he picked it up and suggested this ought to be sufficient! When the sign has been properly explained to the Candidate and the token communicated he is told that the word of the veil is Bezaleel. The lecture explains that Bezaleel was one of the helpers designated to assist Moses in the erection of the tabernacle.

He had special qualities:

*And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in under-*



*standing, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, To devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, And in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship.*<sup>8</sup>

Also of timber:

*And Bezaleel made the ark of shittim wood: two cubits and a half was the length of it, and a cubit and a half the breadth of it, and a cubit and a half the height of it.*<sup>9</sup>

The Candidate is told that the colour of the veil, blue, is emblematical of universal friendship and benevolence—not the first time he has heard such a description. The Lecture tells him that it represents one of the elements—air. The Address also tells him that it is a symbol of royalty and implies an immortal life. This is somewhat confusing because in other situations the colours purple and scarlet are also referred to as “royal” colours. ME Comp Hepburn cited a paper by W Bro JH Baxter “Symbolism of Colour”<sup>10</sup>:

*‘BLUE represents truth, honour and friendship; it is the colour of the heavens symbolising the abode of God.*

*‘On several occasions Moses was commended to wear blue. “Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue: ... that ye may remember, and do all my Commandments, and be holy unto your God.” (Numbers XV 38).*

*‘In the Masonic Order, which professes truth, honour and brotherly love, this ribband of blue is used on the borders of regalia symbolically to remind us that truth and virtue are to be prized above rank and fortune.*

*‘Blue in its highest form symbolises truth, fidelity, friendship and benevolence.’*

The Bible does contain a reference to blue which implies royalty or rank:

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<sup>8</sup> Exodus 31:1-6

<sup>9</sup> Exodus 37:1

<sup>10</sup> “The Excellent Master Degree”, RE Comp Dr Ross Hepburn GSupt, The Auckland Chapter of Research No 93, Transactions, Vol 1, No 3, p5, September 1955.

*And Aholah played the harlot when she was mine; and she doted on her lovers, on the Assyrians her neighbours, Which were clothed with blue, captains and rulers, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding upon horses.<sup>11</sup>*

Ellen Conroy writes<sup>12</sup>:

*'IN the spectrum we ought to be able to recognise both blue and indigo, though many people find difficulty in recognising the indigo ray. Blue belongs to the cooling end of the spectrum, and thus it is right and fitting that symbolically it should be the colour of Truth, which is the result of calm reflection and never of heated argument. Even in everyday language we speak of "true-blue."*

*'Blue is the colour of the heavens that is, blue is the colour of the abode of God'*

And<sup>13</sup>

*'The Egyptian judges wore a breastplate of blue covered with symbolic figures. The blue was to show that they would reverence truth in their judgments and not stoop to bribery.*

*'Moses was commanded to make the robe of the ephod of blue, and on the skirts of it were to be pomegranates of blue. This was to symbolise that the true priest of God was to abound in Truth not in mere facts and formalities. Truth is ever greater than mere facts. Facts may sometimes give the appearance of an untruth, but Truth is ever one and indivisible. As said previously, it contains unity.'*

She comments on the importance of blue to Buddhists, Hindus, and in the religions of Egypt, Mexico, Chaldea and writes:

*'Blue is often called the colour of devotion, but we must remember that devotion is not an end in itself; it is the striving after eternal Truth and Wisdom that matters.'*

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<sup>11</sup> Ezekiel 23:5-6

<sup>12</sup> "The Symbolism of Colour", Ellen Conroy MA, William Rider & Son, Ltd, London, 1921, p27.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, p28.

RE Comp Kenneth Smith suggests the blue would have been derived from the indigo plant (indigofera) from which a dye known as early as 3000 BC was obtained by a process similar to fermentation<sup>14</sup>.

At the Purple Veil the Candidate hears that God provided a further sign with which Moses could convince the people, namely the changing of the appearance of the flesh of his hand to leprous and back. The use of the sign is demonstrated to him by the Captain of the Veil and he is shown the token and is told the word—Aholiab. Aholiab was an assistant to Bezaleel.

*'And I, behold, I have given with him Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan: and in the hearts of all that are wise hearted I have put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded thee; The tabernacle of the congregation, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is thereupon, and all the furniture of the tabernacle'*<sup>15</sup>

*'And he hath put in his heart that he may teach, both he, and Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. Them hath he filled with wisdom of heart, to work all manner of work, of the engraver, and of the cunning workman, and of the embroiderer, in blue, and in purple, in scarlet, and in fine linen, and of the weaver, even of them that do any work, and of those that devise cunning work.'*<sup>16</sup>

The candidate is told that the colour, purple, is an emblem of unity since it is formed by mixing blue and scarlet and therefore symbolises the relationship between Craft Masonry and the Royal Arch. Curiously no mention is made of the symbolism to imperial rank. Of purple Hepburn writes:

*'PURPLE is a combination of Red (positive) and Blue (negative) and can be of many shades. It therefore takes on the symbolic meaning of both—that is the red of love and self-sacrifice and the blue of truth, hence it is symbolic of wisdom and rulership based on sacrifice and honour.*

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<sup>14</sup> "The Degree of Excellent Master", RE Comp Kenneth Smith GLec, The Research Chapter of New Zealand No 93, Transactions, Vol III No 8, June 1971, p119

<sup>15</sup> Exodus 31:6-7

<sup>16</sup> Exodus 35:34-35

*'In churches purple altar cloths, book marks, etc. are used as a sign of mourning on Saint's days: martyrs and angels are often shown clad in purple.'*

Conroy agrees with this<sup>17</sup>:

*'The symbolism of purple partakes of the Red of Love and Self-sacrifice and the blue of Truth ; hence it was considered symbolic of Wisdom, and is mentioned as being the colour of the canopy of Solomon's chariot. Purple was considered the most glorious of colours, for the purple dye was so costly that it became part of the insignia of royalty. In England it is used as the sign of royal mourning.'*

Known as early as 1600 BC the dye was costly because it was derived from a small shellfish, the murex, each of which yielded only a tiny amount of the dye. It has been suggested that as many as 12,000 of the molluscs were required to produce 1.4 g of pigment, just sufficient for a single toga<sup>18</sup>. Smith writes:

*'Being extremely costly, robes of this colour were worn as a mark of imperial or royal rank, whence the phrase "born to the purple", while in the Church "promotion to the purple" was promotion to the rank of Cardinal.'*

The Address tells the Candidate that it is also symbol of water.

The third veil brings yet another advice from God to Moses that should the people still not believe him he should pour water from the river onto dry land and it would become blood. This sign is demonstrated, the token given and the word—I Am That I Am. If the Candidate has been listening he will recognise it as the first name given by God when Moses asked who he should say spoke to him. He is told that the colour of the veil, red, is emblematical of fervency and zeal.

Hepburn writes:

*'RED is the lowest in the spectrum: it is the colour of blood, and denotes life, action, cheerfulness, courage and energy. Red becomes the colour of self-sacrifice and suffering for others. In some*

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid p36

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.jolique.com/dyes\\_colorants/purple\\_passion.htm](http://www.jolique.com/dyes_colorants/purple_passion.htm)

*churches a red lamp is always kept burning as a sign of deep sacrificial love of God.*

*'Red is the most defined colour. It symbolises fire, courage, progression, power, happiness, sacrifice and suffering.'*

Conroy confirms this:

*'Red is the colour of the blood ; hence, is it surprising that red is the colour denoting life and action, cheerfulness and enthusiasm? ... Red is used by healers as a powerful stimulant and tonic, thus it has the meaning of health and vigour.*

*'Courage was said to be the gift of Mars, the god of war; hence red is the colour of war, whether in its most barbaric, cruel form or in its chivalrous form. ... So it is that the brave man is known as the man of self-sacrifice. Thus the colour of red takes on this added meaning of self-sacrifice, sorrow, or suffering, which at first seem contradictory meanings to those of enthusiasm, life, and cheerfulness.*

*'In art the martyrs are often clothed in red as a sign that they have suffered, and also as a sign that they had the enthusiasm for the cause, so that the sorrows and cruelties they endured were accounted by them nothing ; for red is pre-eminently the colour of enthusiasm, of the fire which inspires a man to fight his way through all obstacles or perish in the attempt. It is thus most fitting that Moses should receive his life work when near the burning bush ... Red is the colour of the leader, the colour of the kingly robes.*

*'Red is also the colour of the flame of love. As Robert Burns sings gaily : "Oh, my Love is like a red, red rose, That's newly sprung in June."*

*'Sometimes red may be used as a sign of exuberant animal spirits, e.g. in the expression " to paint the town red."*

*'Lastly, let us remember that the name Adam means red, and so he symbolises man unregenerate, i.e. of the earth, earthy.'*

Smith writes that biblical scarlet was probably obtained from the female Kermes insect (a species of scale insect) from which was extracted the red dye. Alizarin, a red vegetable colourant was known to the ancient

Egyptians and Persians. He points out that cochineal would not have been used since it was found only in Mexico and Peru and was not known in the Mediterranean until the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

The Lecture takes the Candidate through the history of the degree—how and why it came about; recaps the Decree of Cyrus and the controls placed on those who wished to avail themselves of it; discusses the tabernacle, its coverings and size and in particular the veils; what Zerubbabel did on arrival in Jerusalem; how each of the veils was guarded; what new arrivals were required to do; and recaps the signs, tokens and words of the veils.

It may be of interest that the lecture tells that Zerubbabel, on arrival, erected a tabernacle and an altar. The book of Ezra records<sup>19</sup>:

*‘And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem. Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God. And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, even burnt offerings morning and evening. They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required; From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid.’*

Curiously, although the “feast of tabernacles” is referred to, there is no mention of a tabernacle being erected. An altar was, however, erected. This is an example of where our Masonic allegories drift from the descriptions of the events we portray in the Bible. The reason in this case is simple and obvious. By presenting the Candidate with secrets which will enable him to move to the next stage in his Masonic career—the Degree of the Holy Royal Arch—we must also give him the opportunity to use them. By focussing on the signs used by Moses, therefore, and relating them to the veils, we must create for him an appropriate stage. Although

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<sup>19</sup> Ezra 3:1-6

there is no mention of a Zerubbabel erecting a tabernacle, it is no long stretch of our imaginations to assume that he may well have done so.

You might also like to note that here is mentioned the time taken to travel from Babylon to Jerusalem—7 months which means they travelled about 6 km/day.

The Candidate is yet to receive two charges.

The Address informs him of what awaits him when he progresses to the Royal Arch Degree by sketching an analogy with the ancient sojourner arriving in Jerusalem and presenting himself before the tabernacle and asking to be admitted to the Sanhedrin and requesting work on the temple. It recaps his journey through the veils and amplifies on the symbolism of the colour and draws an analogy with our journey through life and the trials with which we are presented. It tells him why the second temple is to be built and reinforces the correction of errors and transgressions.

The final charge outlines his obligations as an Excellent Master and exhorts him to continue to acquire knowledge.

In summary the Degree reinforces and further explains some of the elements of the philosophy underpinning Freemasonry:

- Faith that the temple will be rebuilt as analogy to the dedication of our lives
- Hope that we will be allowed to participate in that process by improving and correcting the ways in which we live our lives
- Fortitude by drawing on the analogy of the time and dedication it took to travel 1,450 km in those days and recognising that nothing comes easily—that time and effort are required to create something substantial, and thereby building on the lessons of the First Degree

