



Province of East Lancashire

Explanation of the Royal Jewel

Overview

The Royal Arch Jewel is arguably the most important of all Masonic Jewels, incorporating as it does in a compact symbolic form the very core of the Masonic credo, covering not only our behaviour towards our fellow men in this life but, more importantly, our relationship with and duty to the Most High, our Creator.

After Exaltation, each new Companion is presented with a small red-covered booklet providing a synoptic account of the Order, within which is included a brief description of the RA Jewel. For most the matter ends there and the Jewel becomes just another piece of Masonic regalia that has the peculiarity of being worn also in Craft Lodges. To leave it thus is regrettable and what follows is an endeavour to explain in simple fashion what is in fact a complex though very interesting story.

In the wide variety of RA Rituals available, there frequently appear so called 'explanations' of the Jewel, the majority of which – apart from a brief reference and translation of its wording – devote themselves to an attempt at dubious and sterile mathematical proof of the relationship between its angles and those of the five Platonic Bodies. Assuredly 'dubious' because it is doubtful whether our antecedents would have employed such a convoluted system for deciding the design of the Jewel, and 'sterile' because such 'explanations', serve only to obfuscate the issue and, more importantly, provide nothing that adds to Masonic knowledge. One might reasonably have expected the Symbolical Lecture to engage in some form of explanation but, again, this deals solely with angles and Platonic Bodies instead of conveying some means of unravelling the deeper implications of the Jewel.

To achieve full understanding, it will be first necessary to go back in time to before the Union early in the 19th century when Freemasonry was essentially Christian in nature, a factor that was understandably reflected in the Royal Arch and its Ritual. And since the Royal Arch was overtly Christian, it became customary for many Chapters to meet on Sundays outside the normal hours of Divine Worship. There is evidence, too, that at the beginning of the 18th century operative Masons had worked in the Christian tradition. In those days, the Volume of the Sacred Law was invariably opened at the first verse of the Gospel according to St John, which begins: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". The crucial and central issue of 'the Word' will be returned to later. It will help, however, if

we first examine briefly the principal features constituting the basic form of the Jewel. These consist of two concentric circles, the outer denoting Eternity and the inner the Deity, within which we find two interlaced equilateral triangles at whose centre is a further – irradiated – triangle, symbol of the Creator, and compasses extended over a globe portraying Him as the Great Architect of the Universe. The interlaced triangles remind us of the twofold nature of man – spiritual and material. At the bottom of the Jewel is a scroll having at its centre a further circle within which is a Triple Tau: at its head is another scroll, this being purely decorative. The wording on the circle, triangles and scroll will be explained in due course. If you have been looking at your own Jewel, you will observe that it is in fact suspended upside down.

The explanation which follows falls into four sections:

1. The Trinitarian legacy
2. The Reverse of the Jewel
3. The Obverse of the Jewel
4. The Key to its meaning

The Trinitarian Legacy

The effect of the Trinitarian influence is considerable and reflected in various ways; as a start, consider the following:

- 3 Greater Lights
- 3 Lesser Lights
- 3 Taus (united to form the Triple Tau)
- 3 Principals
- 3 Sojourners
- 3 Syllables of the Word

According to an old RA manuscript, the six lights and Triple Tau are explained thus:

- The three Lesser represent the moral and religious light to be drawn from the Law and the Prophets.

- The three Greater represent the great mystery of the Trinity, "...which every prudent three will rather make the subject of his (sic) private meditation than his (sic) public converse...".
- The three Taus forming the Triple Tau also referred to the Trinity.

The Greek letter 'Tau' is the nineteenth letter of the Greek alphabet and in special form – the Triple Tau – has acquired a crucial centrality within the Royal Arch. This will become apparent as the exposition proceeds. However, at this stage it will be interesting to make allusion to the second part of the Mystical Lecture, where we find a modified quotation from verses 3 and 4, Chapter 9, of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel as printed in the King James's version. The Biblical words are:

" And he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's ink-horn by his side Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof....."

Those who did not bear the 'mark' were slain. But, as so often occurs, Masonry itself seems to have decided upon the use of the Triple Tau, since the Bible certainly bears no reference to it. This type of aberration does occur in Ritual, a classic example in the Craft being when the WM is demonstrating the Secrets of the Second Degree, because there is no Biblical support for the phrase:

" for God said, in strength I will establish this Mine house to stand firm for ever"

However, that the Triple Tau acquired special sanctity in the Royal Arch is beyond doubt and its numinous character is equally certain. Without question, operative Masons as far back as the 14th Century were inspired by it and, after all, these people originated the working, passing it down by word of mouth until mutated versions became published many centuries later.

The Triple Tau is present on the Jewel, Sash, and Apron of Companions – three times three – and has long been regarded as the badge of a RA Mason: it is to be noted that, whereas before the Union it was emblematic of the Trinity, it is now an allusion to the Deity.

All these 'threes' are extremely important and will be found to feature in many ways in the RA Jewel in the form of similar triads. As an aside, it is further to be noted that it is not just the Royal Arch that deals in triads for there are many present, too, in Craft Masonry. You can find these yourselves but the following are worth mentioning:

3 Knocks on the Lodge door by the Tyler secured our admission at Initiation

3 Knocks of the Tyler are repeated on the shoulders of the JW and SW – another three times three

3 Regular steps in the Craft Degrees, each in the form a Tau 3 Separated Taus feature on a Master's Apron

One explanation of the Tyler's knocks is as follows:

"Ask and shall be given you"

"Seek, and ye shall find"

"Knock, and it shall be opened unto you"

A partially successful attempt was made in the late 18th century to deny the established symbolism of the Triple Tau by asserting that, instead of being three Taus in conjunction, it was in fact a letter 'T' over the letter 'H', signifying 'Templum Hierosolyema' or 'The Temple at Jerusalem': it was later claimed merely to be the initials of the maker of the Jewel – Thomas Harper. The latter aberration was still current in some quarters at the middle of the 20th century.

The Reverse of the Jewel

Returning to the Jewel, on its reverse, beneath the circle containing the Triple Tau is a scroll with only one-third engraved. The vacant spaces after 'Exalted' are left blank but can be completed by inserting the date of Exaltation on the lower part, and name or number of the Chapter on the other. The scroll is rarely completed and, whilst this

is non-essential, the same does not apply to the vacant space on the material triangle on the obverse of the Jewel, to which reference will be made later.

Moving on to the remaining inscription on the reverse of the Jewel, between the two concentric circles there is a double Latin triad:

Deo, Regi, Fratribus – Honor, Fidelitas, Benevolentia

The two triads are to be read conjointly and translate literally as follows: Deo Honor

= To God Honour

Regi Fidelitas = To the King, Fidelity

Fratibus Benevolentia = To the Brethren, Love

The inscription is a translation from the Regius Poem - the most cherished Manuscript in the possession of Grand Lodge - for it dates back to the 14th century. The actual lines of the poem which have been Latinised on the Jewel are:

Deo Honor

"That whoso will con this craft and come to estate" "He must love well God and Holy Church algate"

Regi Fidelitas

"And to his liege Lord the King" "To be tru to Him over alle thing"

Fratibus Benevolentia

"And thy fellows thou love also" "For that the craft will that thou do"

The final inscription on the reverse of the Jewel is once more in the form of a double triad on the interlaced triangles, reading on the one:

Concord, Truth, Peace

and on the other:

Wisdom, Strength, Beauty

The meaning of "Concord, Truth, Peace" is obvious but, in the case of "Wisdom, Strength, Beauty" it should be noted that this alludes to neither the Wisdom of King Solomon, nor the Strength of King Hiram, nor the Beautifying hand of Hiram Abif. Instead, the reference is to the:

"Omniscience, Omnipotence, and Omnipresence"

of the True and Living God Most High, those attributes of God recited at the Opening of every Royal Arch Chapter.

The Obverse of the Jewel

On the obverse of the jewel, the wording on the Scroll is complete, reading: "Nil nisi clavis deest" – "Nothing is wanting but the key"

The inscription between the two concentric circles has similar import:

Si talia jungere possis sit tibi scire satis – If thou canst understand what follows thou knowest enough

We now come to the crux of the Jewel. On the interlaced triangles there is again a double triad, but the triad on the second triangle is incomplete.

The triangle with its apex pointing upwards is the spiritual triangle having on its base the inscription "We have found" which is repeated in Greek and Latin on the sides of the triangle.

On the material triangle - the one with its apex pointing downwards the base is left blank and on the two sides are, respectively:

"Cultor Dei"t – "Civis Mundi"

Some 'Explanations' have tried to connect "Invenimus" on the spiritual triangle with "Cultor Dei" and "Civis Mundi" on the material triangle, translating the sentence thus formed as:

"We have found the worship of God, oh citizen of the world"

The meaning thus ascribed is not acceptable for "Cultor" is nominative case incorrectly treated as accusative case: furthermore, no Latin dictionary gives the meaning of "Cultor" as "worship". Instead we find that it signifies "worshipper" or "reverencer": the former needs no explanation and the latter is defined in Chambers 20th Century Dictionary as 'one who venerates'. And even if the word had been "Cultorem" instead of "Cultor" the translation could not have accounted for the vacant space on the base of the material triangle.

The Key

When you received your Grand Chapter Certificate there was a vacant space that you were required to fill with your signature, as you did also on the Grand Lodge Certificate. Similarly, when you received the Royal Arch jewel there was this vacant space on the material triangle for your 'name'. When this has been inserted the triad on that triangle will be complete and read:

"A. B. – Cultor Dei – Civis Mundi"

By this endorsement the holder of the Jewel acknowledges that he is a "worshipper" (or "reverencer") of God, a "citizen of the world", but he does more than that for at the same time he subscribes to the wording on the spiritual triangle:

"We have found"

However, the Jewel does not tell us what is found – the Key is still wanting. Despite their number in Speculative Masonry, by far the most important of all Masonic allegories is "the search for the Word" – observe particularly that it is NOT seeking the Sacred and Mysterious Name of the Most High, but the "WORD" that has come down to us through countless ages, carrying always the same meaning.

"The Will or Law of God"

This is the Key, so that the Companion who thinks he has found the Key in the discovery of the Sacred and Mysterious Name would do well to remember that, to Christians, the greatest teacher of all warned that it is not sufficient to say "Lord! Lord!" but rather to do the will of God.

Current Masonic teaching is rather similar to the Keystone concealed under the rubble because, during the past 150 years, so-called 'improvers' of the ritual have made alterations serving to destroy the clues to the great allegory of the "Search for the Word". No longer is the Volume of the Sacred Law in our Lodges opened at the first verse of the Gospel according to St John, as was originally the custom.

The phrase "In the beginning was the Word" has disappeared from modern rituals and catechisms despite the fact that it features constantly in old Masonic rituals and manuscripts: the same can be said of the phrase:

"And the light shineth in the darkness and the darkness comprehended it not".

As a result – and through no fault of the Brethren or Companions – one is now bound to say:

"And the light shineth in darkness but the Brethren comprehend it not"

A plain clue to the meaning of the search was to be found in the old prayer for the Candidate at his Exaltation for instead of:

"and may he ever remember that the object of our institution is the welfare of our fellow creatures"

The actual words used were:

" ever remembering that the object and intent off our institution is obedience to Thy Sacred Laws"

Herein lies the Key to that allegory which commenced with the second of the three Knocks by which we first gained admission into a Masonic Lodge:

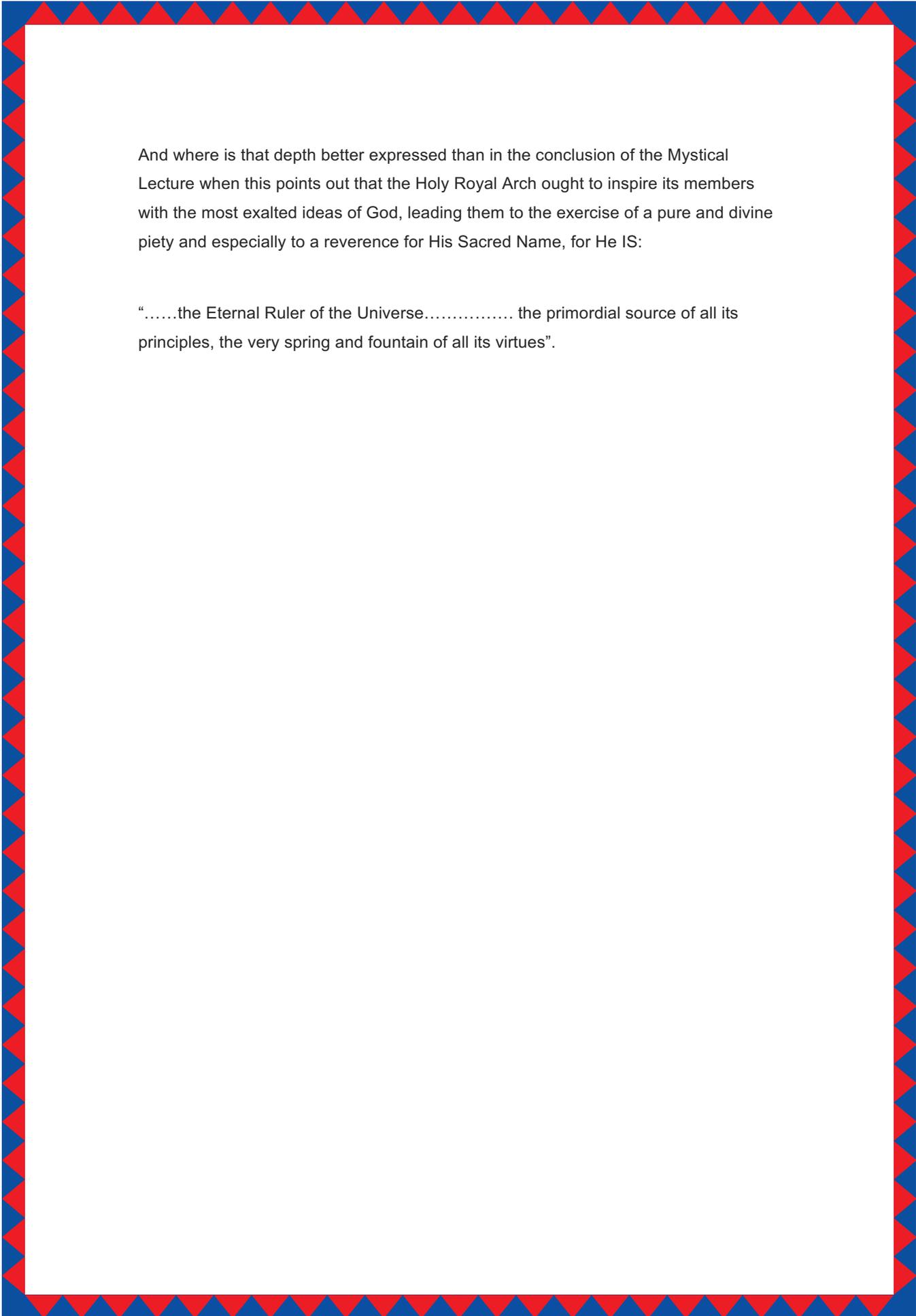
"Seek and ye shall find"

Thus, the Companion who has found the Word should certainly have his name inserted on the jewel in the vacant space on the triangle. He should also be able to appreciate the meaning of the inscription between the concentric circles:

`If thou canst understand this thou knowest enough"

Because the WORD, the Will of God, comprises all the tenets, precepts, and principles of Freemasonry - everything that Masonry teaches. Happy is the Mason that finds the 'Word' and achieves understanding, for that 'Word', amongst other things, incorporates the grand design of being happy and communicating happiness.

The foregoing, Companions, is an entirely logical historical explanation of just why the Royal Arch Jewel has the form that many take for granted. For, as has been shown, it demonstrates conclusively the true meaning and profundity of an Order whose roots lie deep in a religious past.



And where is that depth better expressed than in the conclusion of the Mystical Lecture when this points out that the Holy Royal Arch ought to inspire its members with the most exalted ideas of God, leading them to the exercise of a pure and divine piety and especially to a reverence for His Sacred Name, for He IS:

“.....the Eternal Ruler of the Universe..... the primordial source of all its principles, the very spring and fountain of all its virtues”.

**For further information, contact
The Education & Development Committee**

Provincial Office, Rossendale Masonic Hall

Ashday Lea, Haslingden Road,

Rossendale, Lancashire, BB4 6QX

This paper was prepared by:

WBro John Cavanagh PProvGSN



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