

## **From the Grand Council of Royal & Select Masters of Ohio, PHA website**

No rite of Freemasonry has come into its own so much as the series of degrees known as the Cryptic Rite, also known as the Cryptic Masons. Its popularity is well deserved for there are no more beautiful or meaningful degrees in all Freemasonry than those conferred in the Council of Cryptic Masons.

One reason for its popularity is that it completes a story, a Masonic allegory. Freemasonry is very philosophical and teaches its ideals by allegory or story. This philosophy is moralistic and religious however Freemasonry is not a religion, nor a substitute for one. A requirement for membership in Freemasonry is a professed belief in God and eternal life. It is mandatory that a man profess a personal faith in a Supreme Being prior to becoming a Freemason. Freemasonry never attempts to alter any one's beliefs. Freemasonry offers no theology or plan of salvation. However, it does offer a moral plan to use in this world. Leaving the Mason to look to his religion for salvation into the next world. Ancient Cryptic Masonry centers around the story of the preservation, loss and recovery of the Word. The Word represents man's search for life's purpose and the nature of GOD. Symbolic Freemasonry, as in the Lodge, teaches of the loss of the Word and hope for its recovery. Royal Arch Masonry, as in the Chapter, teaches its recovery. Cryptic Masonry, as in the Council, completes this story by teaching of the Word's initial preservation.

### **ORIGIN OF THE DEGREES**

As in many of the Masonic degrees, the origins of the degrees of Cryptic Masonry are shrouded in mystery. Yet, they have attained a substantial growth and one out of every two Royal Arch Masons is a Cryptic Mason. Nearly two hundred years ago the degrees of Royal Master and Select Master appeared. Traveling Masonic lecturers throughout the East were conferring them upon Masons, while engaging in instructing in Craft (Lodge) and Capitulars (Chapter) degrees. Even one Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite included the degree of Select Master as one of its "detached" degrees. But these beautiful degrees were not to remain detached for any length of time. The state of Connecticut bore the first Grand Council in 1819. In Virginia and West Virginia, the degrees developed in the Chapter of Royal Arch Masons where they still remain. In the 1870's a General Grand Council was formed for the United States of America. Today this Grand Council numbers most of the Grand Councils in the United States, as well as the western section of Canada.

## **THE VAULT AND THE MYSTERIES**

Biblical students and archaeologists know of the vaults or crypts beneath King Solomon's Temple. Masonic Degrees were probably not actually conferred in these vaults. However, such a legend does persist throughout Freemasonry. The legends, conveyed in this system of degrees form a beautiful allegory or story. The Masonic author, Albert G. Mackey, writing of the vault, says: "The vault was, therefore, in the ancient mysteries, symbolic of the grave; for initiation was symbolic of death, where alone Divine Truth is to be found. Freemasons have adopted the same idea. They teach that death is but the beginning of Life; that if the first, or evanescent Temple of our transitory life be on the surface, we must descend into the secret vault of death before we can find that sacred deposit of Truth, which is to adorn our second Temple of Eternal Life." This teaching is not unusual in Freemasonry since as was stated previously the requirements for membership include a professed belief in God and one's eternal life.

## **THE USE OF THE NAME CRYPTIC**

The degrees of the York Rite are classified as Symbolic (Lodge of Master Masons), Capitulars (Chapter of Royal Arch Masons), Cryptic (Council of Cryptic Masons), and Chivalric (Commander of Knights Templar). The Cryptic Rite or degrees derives its name from the setting of the degrees of Royal Master and Select Master in the underground crypt beneath King Solomon's Temple. The word cryptic means hidden, hence its use in describing these degrees. The last of the series of Cryptic degrees is not cryptic because it does not comply with the requirement of a vault scene. It might be regarded as one of the Cryptic Rite's detached degrees for it has no connection either in history or symbolism with those of Royal Master and Select Master.