



Good day Worthy Knights,

In this part 78, The Appendant Orders of the Holy Sepulchre and of St John the Evangelist

From Delving further Beyond the Craft

Revd Neville Barker Cryer (In extenso)

The 'Historical Note' which precedes at least the 1973 ritual reads:

There is no connection, historically or ritually, between the Masonic Degree of Knight of the Holy Sepulchre and the medieval Military Order of the same name which is said to have been founded in the eleventh century.

The Military Order was associated with the Constantinian Order of St. George, sometimes referred to as the Red Cross of Constantine. The ceremony of Admission originally took place in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and details from the diary of a pilgrim who was received in the fifteenth century have been recorded by H.F.M. Prescott in her [book], 'Jerusalem Journey', London 1954.

There is much more in that note, but we will have to come to that later. There are three things that are intriguing and puzzling about this portion of the statement.

The first is the fact that it was thought necessary to have such a statement at all, especially when one notices that in the 1917 edition of this working there is not the least trace of any such note. Why should that be?

The second intriguing matter is that whilst there is said to be no connection between the medieval and Masonic Orders bearing the same name, the earlier one used to have, and ours now has, a close link with the Red Cross of Constantine. Why should there be this apparent difference?

Thirdly, though it is apparently suggested as being of no consequence, we are given the details of where we can observe what took place in the medieval Order even though, we are here told, it has no ritual link with what we do today. All these matters do seem very strange. It is clear that we need to reflect on each of them a bit further.

Firstly, why is there such a note at all? Surely it must be because there were those in the last century who claimed that there was such a link between the medieval and Masonic ceremonies and hence the chiefs of this Order felt that they had to make plain that to hold such a view was either incorrect, undesirable or open to misinterpretation. Which reason, however, was the correct one? If the claim that there was a connection was incorrect then that surely has something worthwhile to imply about what is a strong current obsession with the theory that there was a definite link between medieval knighthood and its practices and our present Masonic working.

If the link was thought undesirable then that might well have something to do with the religious affiliation of the older institution. The Constantinian Order of St. George, which was both ruled over, and written about, by a certain George Rhodocanakis, was a wholly Roman Catholic one, and it was therefore very unlikely that any of our 19th century

forebears would have wanted to be associated with that body. There was bound to be a refusal to allow the Masonic Order of the Holy Sepulchre to be linked with what was a totally Roman Catholic practice.

On the other hand it may be that this preliminary note reflects an attempt to avoid misinterpretation by addressing what is a real issue in this field of medieval and modern ceremonies. What I believe is the fundamental flaw in many of the books that claim knightly origins for Masonic practices (that in books such as *The Hiram Key*, *The Templar Legacy*, *The Head of God* or *The Sword and the Grail*) is the contention that because there is some kind of similarity between what was done and said in those days with what is said and done now, that of itself proves a connection between the earlier and later bodies.

Such thinking even led some of the early contributors to the Quatuor Coronati Lodge Transactions to make the mistake of wondering if recognisable Maori greeting signs proved their users to be primitive Freemasons. Perhaps this Note was inserted intentionally to combat such superficial thinking. If so, this too is to be commended.

Yet that cannot be the end of our queries. If there is a good basis for this Note it seems odd that an absence of connection between the Holy Sepulchre and the Red Cross or Constantinian Order should be stressed when a close association in several particulars is exactly what happens to represent the current situation.

When Richard Carlile produced his *Manual of Freemasonry* in the 1820s, he included a comprehensive degree called the Red Cross of Rome and Constantine. One feature of that degree is that in addition to much that we would recognise in our Red Cross ceremony of today there was the following Catechism which relates directly to both the Traditional Oration in our Holy Sepulchre degree as well as to the Installation part of our Red Cross series. Some of the wording of that section is as follows:

What was the first Grand Point?

The humility of Christ upon the Cross.

The second?

St. Helena going from Rome to Jerusalem.

The third?

The pious and diligent enquiry of St. Helena after the sacred spot, Golgotha.

The fourth?

St. Helena finds three crosses and is much perplexed to know which is that of Jesus Christ.

The fifth?

Macarius, Bishop of Jerusalem, directs St. Helena how to discover the cross of Christ from those of the two thieves.

The sixth?

The first public acts of St. Helena and Constantine after the cross of Christ has been found...

Apart from using the name Marcellinus instead of Macarius for the Jerusalem pontiff, these responses are a full summary of what we still use, and here it is still linked, as it was in the medieval form, with the Red Cross of Constantine. One still has to ask, then, what can the Note mean?

The mystery remains when we examine the reference made to the book by H.F.M. Prescott. The actual passages in question are on pages 138 to 140 and first of all describe an event during the pilgrimage around 1480.

During the second visit [to the church] the noble laymen among the company were to be dubbed Knights of the Holy Sepulchre, and admitted to that order ... The ceremony took place during the hour before midnight while the rest of the pilgrims roamed at will about the church...

Of the ceremony itself, which took place in the innermost chamber of the tomb, we have three separate and conflicting accounts which ... show, that for all the antiquity which is claimed for the order ... there was no set ritual of conferment.

De Caumont [a nobleman] had brought with him a Knight Hospitaller from Rhodes to perform the ceremony. After Mass at midnight the Hospitaller gave de Caumont the accolade, 5 times in memory of the five wounds of Christ, and once in honour of St. George, and then, assisted by the still vested celebrant friar, delivered into the new knight's hand the naked sword, bidding him receive it 'in honour and reverence of God and of my Lord St. George'.

De Caumont, having sheathed the sword, took an oath of 6 clauses: to guard Holy Church, to help in the recovery of the Holy Land, to defend his folk and keep justice, to keep his marriage holy, to do no treason, and to protect widows and orphans.

In 1483 a Knight, Brother John of Prussia, facing the tomb, girded the most eminent of the pilgrims, the Count of Solms, with a sword and spurs. The Count was 'bidden to kneel, and to bow himself so that his breast and arms rested upon the top of the tomb.

Note: My own doubt on the date of 1483 as the Count was only 15 years old then.

Thus kneeling he received, in the name of the Trinity, a threefold accolade. This done, Brother John -raised up the Count, loosed the sword and spurs from him, kissed him, and respectfully said, "May it be for thy good."

Fifteen years later the same procedure took place in the innermost chamber of the sepulchre save that, after receiving the sword and spurs and kneeling down, the candidate partly withdrew his sword, laid two fingers of his right hand on the blade, swore to be God's knight and to keep obligations like those that were stated above. The same Brother John then drew his sword, struck the candidate on the shoulder, saying: 'Arise, knight, in honour of the Holy Sepulchre and the Knight St. George.'

To be continued.

