

THE BADGE OF ROYAL ARCH COMPANIONS

In 1730 the Prime Officers of the Brethren of the Rosy Cross, who were the same as the Order of the Holy Royal Arch, were said to wear some Rosy Crosses on their robes of office. The colour was Rosy that is, red which agrees with the constant practice of the later Royal Arch Masons. The Crosses, we have found, were really Taus, (patibulary crosses) and we presume that they were three in number, the Tau being thus triplicated as everything in the Royal Arch was. Therefore, in those three red crosses, we have the equivalent of the Triple Tau, still used on our Aprons and on our Summons as the Badge of the Companions.

Indeed, we are told that it was this feature of their symbolism which had given rise to the name by which those people were often times designated.

The Brethren of the Rosy Cross were also identified with the Royal Order of Scotland; and, as a matter of fact, the second part of the Ritual of these people consisted of an introduction to the Rosie Cross.

In 1735, we are assured, the newly appointed G. P. M. of Durham, on the occasion of his Installation, quoted some rhymes about " the Sword and Trowel, which, according to Yarker, were found verbatim in the Ritual of the Harodim Rosy Cross a statement in which we see confirmed the alleged identity of the Harodim with the Order of the Rosy Cross, and of both with the Royal Arch, where the Sword and Trowel are still referred to.

Dr. Otto Zoeckler, in his book on The Cross of Christ, has an appendix on the three-armed cross, the crux commissa of Lipsius terminology that is, the T cross and he quotes some of the utterances of ancient writers in reference to it for instance, Tertullian calling it species crucis; Paulinus, figura crucis; Augustine, similitudo crucis; and so forth. He actually gives some early Christian grave inscriptions, whereon the Cross appears as taking the form of a Tau.

Now, however, in the records of the first Modern Chapter of London, we find that in 1765 the Companions were ordered to wear Aprons of white Leather, Indented round with Crimson ribbon, and strings of the same, with a T. H. in Gold, properly displayed on the Bible, and purple Garters Indented with Pink.

As we shall see, the T. H. was the same symbol as the Three Taus. Those records have nothing special to say about it. If the Companions of that period had been asked why they designated it T. H., they probably would have told us that it was because that peculiar symbol looked like our Roman letters T. H., and also that by thus speaking of it they avoided using its proper name, which was Triple Tau, that name being one of the secrets of the Royal Arch. They had lost sight of the fact that the Tau was a Cross symbol and the whole thing was a puzzle.

In the Royal Arch Chapter, formed in London in 1765, the Principals wore no Aprons; and therefore the Badge of the Royal Arch Companions was not to be seen about the part of the body where that garment is worn; but presumably they exhibited the Badge somewhere else on their robes of office, as was done, we are told, by the Prime Officers of the Rosy Cross Chapter in 1730.

Some Companions have raised the question whether there is any difference between the two modes of writing the symbol. We answer that we cannot see any. The only difference that might be pointed out is in the arrangement of the three Taus: in the first instance the first Tau stands above the other two, quite detached from them; whereas in the other case the three are joined together and form one single figure.

The name given to it was invariably the Triple Tau; but sometimes the symbol occurred written one way, sometimes the other. In the Deptford Ritual of 1797 the three Taus are united; but even in that period it was not always so; hence the use of the cryptic designation T. H.

The writing of this symbol w as T. H. was most convenient to printers, because in their founts of type they found a ready means of setting it up. If any one has a better way of explaining the designation T. H. let him do so. The symbol may sometimes have been described as T. over H. (as one of our correspondents does), but its real name has always been the same THE TRIPLE TAU.

In a MS. entitled Royal Arch Ritual and Discourses (which may be seen in the Library of Grand Lodge), once the property of W. H. Dee, December, 1799, when the Triple Tau is referred to, we notice that it is described thus :

The Royal Arch Masons Badge.

The compound character which signifies Templum Hierosolyma which is always used as the Royal Arch Masons Badge.

Evidently the Royal Arch Masons were familiar with this symbol which had for long always been used as the distinctive Badge of their Order. As we have seen, the Badge had a name, one which apparently was written down for the first time in a Royal Arch Catechism, which is now found written on paper said to have been manufactured in 1804, but which was probably copied from an older MS., the date of its composition being uncertain. In that Catechism, when the M. E. Z. has asked to what our symbolical arrangement of the greater and lesser lights corresponds, the answer is: To the mysterious 111, or triple Tau, etc. Surely this is not of less evidential value than if it occurred in an older document, for we have no ground for suspecting that there had been a change of name, or that Triple Tau was a newly coined one; far from it, seeing that it is used quite casually without any explanation or comment, we must assume that it was an established and well-known name for something quite familiar.

And here we see that in 1797 the triple Tau was a compound character. Compounded of what and why so compounded, the historic name itself makes it abundantly clear; for Triple Tau, if it means anything at all, must mean a combination of three Taus. We need not argue when or how the name arose; obviously the symbol was conceived to be made up of three Taus, thus 174. When Adam Brown recast the Ceremonies of the Royal Arch in 1835, he emphatically spoke of the union of the three Taus, thus giving us the views of the Companions of a century ago. Now we speak of their union in the centre; by which we mean that the component elements are the three Taus. Can anyone in the whole world of scholarship give a more satisfactory explanation than this Presumably the original Freemasons at first only used one Hebrew character a Tau; but as it is characteristic of our Speculative Science to triplicate everything, that Tau is also triplicated.

We have seen a brochure on Royal Arch Masonry where there occurs the rash statement that the Triple Tau was not in use before 1825. We have been in correspondence with a Companion who claims to have co-operated in the production of that work and have given him several instances of its use before that date, one in 1781, nearly fifty years before 1825, and have also adduced proofs of its antiquity. Unable to rebut the facts, he merely fenced. As we believe that many Companions are interested in this matter, we suggested submitting our correspondence to the Supreme Chapter to which he once gave his views, but we were told that the letters with which we had been favoured were for our eye only. A

second letter, pleading for such submission, was altogether ignored. All we can do, therefore, is to give the substance of what we wrote in defence of the Royal Arch; although, on the other hand, we can assure our readers that the letters we received contained no theory as to the origin or the meaning of the Triple Tau they merely raised questions and objections.

We have seen that the Royal Arch existed under the selfsame name for certain in 1725. But inasmuch as in the old days the Secrets of Freemasonry could not be committed to writing, nearly seventy years elapsed before any transcript of the Ritual was produced. The Ceremonies of that hybrid type of Freemasonry which originated in 1717 were the subject of many exposures, but the secrets communicated to the Freemasons of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, as far as we know, were never betrayed. What a sad reflection on the Masons of the eighteenth century!

It must be evident to anyone who has considered this subject, that originally the Badge of the Companions consisted of a single Tau; for its name, as far as we can trace it, is always The Triple Tau, the word Tau in that phrase being in the singular. This is an important fact, for as shown in *The Genuine Secrets in Freemasonry*, our predecessors, the Kabbalists, regarded the Hebrew character the Tau, as a highly significant symbol. The Tau was triplicated, and after that, if the symbol was to have any name at all, this name was bound to be The Triple Tau.

The Tau was always a conspicuous object in the Chapter; and the Companions must have felt that there was more in it than appeared on the surface; hence the use of the phrase in connection with it. And it is important to observe that the name could not have originated with the modern Masons; all that the modern Masons did was to effect the union of the three Taus at the centre. In Kabbalism, too, everything was triplicated, and accordingly the name seems to have always been the Triple Tau, with the word Tau in the singular.

We do not know whether Tyndale was a Freemason, but it is remarkable that on one occasion he spoke of the sign Thau that defendeth us from the smiting and the power of the evil angels (*Exposition XIII.*). Tyndale regarded the Thau as a sign, or symbol, rather than a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and he evidently had in his mind the conception of something that acted as a charm, preserving men from the smiting of supernatural beings, as was the case where that same sign is mentioned in the vision of Ezekiel.

In historic times, the Hebrew letter Tau was invariably written thus, τ . It was only in a very remote age that it took the form of our Roman letter T. How, then, are we to account for the strange fact that a T, apparently a Roman letter, should be described as a Tau, the Triple Tau. The only possible explanation is that the name is traditional, having come down from a time when our predecessors, being Kabbalistic Jews, were fully acquainted with the archaic forms of the Hebrew alphabet. They, of course, knew that the sign seen by Ezekiel was the last letter of the alphabet, which at that time took the form of a T.

Barnabas, a Christian writer of about A.D. 150, wrote a Tau over an H, apparently a symbol of the Gnostic Mysteries, but something which he could not understand. He did not know that originally that character was Hebrew. He interpreted it according to the Greek system of numeration, taking the Tau to represent 300, and H as the equivalent of our numeral 8. But we have only to remember that the Tau was a Hebrew letter, and that as a numeral it stood for 400, to see the futility of Barnabas efforts. His sophistic explanation went wide of the mark. All the same, his playing with the symbol shows how ancient it is.

In Church decorative art we sometimes come across the Triple Tau in a strange way, which is usually taken as a cryptogram for the name Jesus; but few Christian writers, if any, have seen the connection of this with Freemasonry.