HISTORICAL LECTURE

Mar: My Brother, I will now direct your attention to a brief resume of the History of this Ancient Chivalric Order, and its bearing upon the present ceremonies. While doing so we will pass by the different ceremonial banners and their significance in connection with the history and traditions of the Order will be explained to you.

*They proceed and halt at the first banner, “Birth.”*

Banner Guard: This Order was founded at Jerusalem in the year of our Lord 1099, by the association of a number of pious Knights with the fratres of St. John's Hospital, an establishment previously formed for the relief of pilgrims who had come to worship at the Holy Sepulcher. The name and date upon the white banner, “Birth”, “Palestine, 1099,” commemorates the country of our Saviour's nativity; the place where the Order was founded, and the first epoch in its history.

*They pass to the second banner, “Life.”*

Banner Guard: After a troubled existence of two hundred years in the Holy Land, and being deprived by the wars raging in Europe of needed and looked for assistance, the Order was compelled to evacuate Palestine, and in 1287 it established itself on the Island of Cyprus, and settled in Limisso. The name and date upon the red banner, “Life,” “Cyprus, 1287,”commemorates the second place of their sojourning, and the second epoch in their history.

*They pass to the third banner, “Death.”*

Banner Guard: On the fifth of August 1310, the Island of Rhodes became the property of the Order by right of conquest from the Saracens. In 1312 the Order was strengthened in numbers and enriched by the sequestered property of the Knights Templar, who were in that year suppressed by the cruelty and avarice of Pope Clement V and Phillip the Fair, King of France. This was the first direct approach to that union between the two Orders, which was subsequently formally decreed by the Pope. From this period they were known as the Knights of Rhodes. The remains of the fortifications erected there by the Knights, still bear testimony of their engineering skill and ability. In 1522 the Island of Rhodes was besieged by the Turks under the Emperor Solyman II, and after a memorable defense, their fortifications being reduced to ruins, scarcely one stone remaining standing upon another, they were compelled to surrender and evacuate the island, after an occupancy of more than two hundred years. So deeply had their desperate prowess excited the admiration of their foes, and so firmly implanted were the chivalric ideas of the time, even in the bosom of the infields, that the Knights were allowed to withdraw unmolested, and with the honors of war. The name and date upon the black banner, “Death,” “Rhodes, 1310” commemorates the third place of the sojourning of these valiant Knights, and the third epoch of their history.

*They pass to the fourth banner, “Resurrection.”*

Banner Guard: During the period from 1523 to 1530the Order ceased to exist as a sovereign power, and the remnants of it wandered from place to place without a home. During this most depressing period in their history, they went, first to Castro in the Island of Candia, thence successively to Venice, Viturbo, Villa Franca, Syracuse, and Messina. The name and date of the of the purple banner, “Resurrection,” “Candia, 1523,” commemorates this the fourth memorable period in the history of the Order.

*They pass to the fifth banner, “Ascension.”*

Banner Guard: On the 24th of March, 1530, the Emperor, Charles V, ceded the Island of Malta to the Order, upon condition that they would defend it and repress the ravages of the Moorish rovers, who at that time infested the southern ports of the Mediterranean Sea. Accordingly, under L'Isle Adam, the then Grand Master—one of the brightest names in the history of the Order—they took possession of the Island, and thenceforth acquired the additional title of Knights of Malta. The name and date on the banner, “Ascension,” “Malta, 1530,”commemorates this the fifth memorable period in the history of the Order.

Marshal: The legend connected with the approach of the Knights to their final and most renowned abiding place has given rise to the distinguishing Sign and Word of the Order. The tradition rums, that on coming to take possession of the Island, the Knights approached the shore in their galleys, two men to an oar, the oars in their left hands and their swords in their right hands, singing a psalm as they rowed in their words: “Rex Regum et Dominus Dominorum” (English: “King of Kings and Lord of Lords,”) There islanders seeing them approach in this warlike manner, hailed them through a speaking trumpet, saying in the Arabic language, “Ah tie toom bis sah lahm?” (Do you come in peace?) To which the Knights responded in the same tongue, “Ah tie nah bis sah lahm.” (We come in peace.) Then the islanders responded, “Fa two bis sah lahm.” (Then come in peace.) It is worthy of note that these words, or substantially the same, are the common form of salutation between an Arab, and a stranger at the present day. We hold that the Order now conferred upon you has direct connection with the religious branches of the old Order. It preserves the memory of the Union that took place between the persecuted Templars and the Knights of St. John, and which was continued in Scotland, where the combined Orders held their lands in common up to the time of the dispersion of the religious houses at the Reformation. We, as Masons, perpetuate, cultivate and practice the Christian and chivalric principles of the Ancient Order, in connection with that of the Templars, as a peaceful christian society, to which we now welcome you as a brother. The Mediterranean Pass, which you received in the introductory degree of Knights of St. Paul, tradition informs us, was instituted at an early period of the Order to enable pilgrims on their way to the Holy Land to recognize each other, and as a protection against the Moorish rovers who infested the Mediterranean Sea and Palestine. According to the American Ritual seven officers compose a Priory. They are the Prior, Lieutenant Commander, Captain General, Chaplain, Marshal, Captain of the Outposts, and Guard. The first five of these officers are supposed to be seated at the table in the East, on which is represented the upper and transverse limbs of a Latin Cross. Their naked swords, when deposited on the table, all pointed to one spot-the center-where the heart of our Savior rested when he suffered upon the Cross. This is symbolic in a degree of the Christian character of the Order. The number5 also symbolically reminds us of the passion of our Blessed Savior, and of his five wounds upon the Cross. The number is again repeated in the rounds of the ladder, depicted in one of the quarters of the circle upon the Cross.

Marshal: There are eight Knights seated at the table in the West. According to the European Ceremonial, these Knights are officers of the Priory. They represent the eight languages into which the Order was formerly divided, which were:

Provence, Auvergne, France, Italy, Aragon, Germany,

Castile, Anglo-Bavaria

The table at which these Knights are seated has depicted upon it a Maltese Cross, on center of which is a circle, divided into four quarters by two transverse bars crossing each other at right angles in the center. Each of the four quarters of the circle has a figure upon it:

1. A ship or ancient gallery.
2. A ladder, with five rounds or steps, with the letter B. L. D. R. A.,

one on each step and a speaking trumpet.

1. A hand and a serpent.
2. A human skull, cloven in twain from the top with a double-

edged sword, and a spear beneath it.

The galley reminds us of the maritime character of the Ancient Order, both in war and commerce. The letters on the steps of the ladder correspond with those on the five ceremonial banners, and are the initial letters of the pass-words on those banners. The hand and the serpent reminds us of the history of St. Paul, in connection with the Island of Malta. The human skull, cloven by the two-edged sword, reminds us of the penalty that was inflicted upon traitors to the Order in ancient times. The spear again reminds us of the passion of our Blessed Saviour, for with such an instrument they pierced his side.

Marshal: I will now direct your attention to the Grand Banners of the Order, of which there are two: the Banner of St. John, and that of Malta.

St. John Banner Guard: The Banner of St. John is red, having painted upon it a white Greek Cross, the bars of the Cross extending to the edge of the banner, and on the center of the Cross a “Paschal Lamb.” The letters F. E. R. T. are also on the banner, one in each quarter. These are the initial letters of the four words in the Latin sentence “Fortitudoejus Rhodum tenuit,” which in English is “His courage preserved Rhodes.” According to a tradition of the Order, these letters upon the banner had their origin during the Grand Mastership of Villaret, early in the fourteenth century. In 1315 the Turks laid siege to Rhodes, the new home of the Order, and were repulsed by the brave Christian Knights. Amadeus V, Count of Savoy, having rendered timely and valuable assistance to the besieged Knights Hospitalers during this attack, the Grand Master, in commemoration thereof, caused the letters to be added to the Banner of St. John. The descendants of the Count Amadeus have, since that time, always borne on tier shield a white cross, with the word FERT as a device,- the word being composed of the initial letters of the Latin words, as before described.

Malta Banner Guard: The Maltese Banner is black, having upon it a silver or white Maltese Cross, with a Cross of St. John on a small shield resting on the center. Around the Cross the legend, “Rex Regum et Dominus Dominorum.”

*Revelations, 19:16, KJV*

Music: “Gloria in Excelsis,” after Rex Regun et Dominus Dominorium. If the Prior prefers, the “Gloria” may precede the lecture, though properly it should follow it.

Prior: And now, my Brother, in behalf of the Knights of this Priory I bid you a hearty welcome to all the rights and privileges, even to the disinterested friendship and unbounded hospitality which ever has distinguished and we trust will long continue to adorn and characterize these noble Orders. With the age and the occasion which gave them birth, their adventurous and warlike spirit has passed away, but their moral and beneficent character still remains, bright, in all its primitive beauty and loveliness, to incite, as in days of their greatest glory, that spirit of refined and moral chivalry which should prompt us to press onward in the cause of truth and justice, stimulating us to exertion in behalf of the destitute and oppressed, to wield the sword, if need be, when “Pure and undefiled religion” calls us in her defense, and in a Brother's cause, to do all that may become men. They also teach the triumph of immortality-that, though death has its sting, its infliction is but for a moment; that this frail organization, though here subject to the many “ills that flesh is heir to,” possesses an immortal soul which shall soar to realms of endless bliss, and, beyond the power of change, to live forever.

My Brother, you will now be seated.