

## THE STORY OF THE RITUAL OF FREEMASONRY M.W. BROTHER R.V. HARRIS, PGM, PGS OF THE GRAND LODGE OF NOVA SCOTIA

Let us go back to the period in English history between 1400-1500 A.D.; to an English village, where we find a slowly rising church or cathedral. There we shall find a little community of workmen, with a lodge room as their centre of life and work; the Master or foreman, skilled in building and with a knowledge of the building art; others shaping stones for the building; some entered apprentices, boys 14-21 years of age; fetching tools or mortar or doing errands. These men worked together for many years; they developed a feeling of loyalty to one another; of comradeship, sympathy and service; they had means of recognition, such as signs, grips and words, to enable them to make themselves known to one another should they travel elsewhere.

**EARLY RITUAL** - There has been some uncertainty as to just what ceremonies they had for the admission of new members. In purely operative days, there was probably an informal ritual; their very life was a kind of ritual. A youth entered as a novice, more or less as a matter of business or instruction in building. Later, an oath was administered to him; one of the Old Charges was read; instruction was given in moral conduct and deportment; and the imparting of certain secrets in the art of building or in the means of recognition. It was probably a very simple ceremony - designed to impress him with the high moral standards required of him. Men in the Middle Ages were fond of ceremony. There was probably some ceremony to mark the end of his seven year period of service; when the E.A. would be given full privileges of the Craft.

**ACCEPTED MASONS** - As stated in a previous talk, the lodge occasionally "accepted" one or more local notables such as some bishop, architect or nobleman interested in the moral teaching associated with the working tools and their work. After non-operatives began to be accepted in the lodges, the ceremonies gradually became more elaborate though there was still probably only one ceremony.

**THE UNION** - In 1717, four lodges in London formed the first Grand Lodge. Note, there is no mention of three degrees until 1724, that is seven years after the Grand Lodge was formed. There was a gradual development of ritual between 1717-30. The men who revised ritual in this period of 13 years, were Dr. J.T. Desaguliers, Dr. James Anderson and George Payne. They introduced nothing new but amplified the old ritual and practice; they brought order out of chaos.

Some of the phrases we have inherited in our ritual hark back to operative days and the days of the guilds. Take the reference to "the Golden Fleece and Roman Eagle". That is not as some have said, a reference to certain orders of chivalry nor is it a classical allusion, but a clear reference to the rivalry among the guilds when the golden fleece of the Flemish wool merchants and the Roman Eagle of the German export merchants of the Hanseatic League were the two conspicuous instances of infringements by foreigners of English gild privileges, under royal protection. Here and there a phrase has crept in from the Kabbalah which was much studied in the 15th century; some symbols in common with the Rosicrucian philosophers and the Hermeticists, who flourished in the 17th century have been adopted or engrafted into the ritual; our interpretations of Hebrew words are borrowed from the Geneva Bible which was the Bible of England from 1560 until well into the 18th century. And thus about 1730, our ritual began to take definite form, not the work of a single artist but of many minds as in the case of the great cathedrals, begun in one generation and continued and enlarged in later generations.

**EXPOSES** - In course of time some of the passwords, grips and Masonic phrases, passed into common use and several alleged exposures of the ritual and ceremonies appeared. A list of 27 of the principal expositions published between 1723 and 1852 will be found in Mackey's Cyclopaedia under the word "Expositions".

One of these early exposes was published in 1730 by Samuel Prichard, "an unprincipled and needy brother", entitled "Masonry Dissected", a compilation of truth and falsehood. It went through many editions, was translated into French, German and Dutch, and became the basis of all later expositions such as "Three Distinct Knocks", 1760; "Jachin and Boaz", 1762; "Mohhabone", 1766' "Tubal Kain", 1767. A great many exposes manuals and monitors have been published in the last 100 years. May I warn you about them as unreliable and untrustworthy? These exposes were, of course, the cause of much confusion at the time they appeared but for the most part, they have proved harmless. The solitary exception was the Morgan expose.

**WILLIAM MORGAN** - William Morgan, a dissolute and worthless printer of Batavia, N.Y. having failed at everything else, undertook about 1816 to make money by betraying the secrets of an Order his presence polluted. A few Masons who were foolishly misled, had him arrested on a petty charge, got him out of the country and apparently paid him to stay out. Had no attention been paid to his alleged expose it would have been soon forgotten, like many another before it.

Rumours that he had been abducted were started, and he was said to have been thrown into the Niagara River, or murdered by the Masons. Not the slightest scrap of evidence has ever been found that he was ever killed, much less murdered by Masons.

Thurlow Weed and a pack of unscrupulous politicians took it up and made capital for their own purposes. A body found on the shore of Lake Ontario a year later was identified by Weed (who had never known Morgan) and by Morgan's wife as her husband. Although another woman named Munroe identified the same body as that of her husband drowned a week before. "No matter", Weed said, "It's good enough Morgan until after the election."

Lodges everywhere repudiated and denounced the alleged "crime" and politicians, church bodies and newspapers in turn denounced the Masons. An Anti-Masonic party was formed, fed on frenzy, and candidates were even nominated for the Presidency of the United States and Henry Clay was defeated because he was a Mason, although Andrew Jackson, another Mason, was elected!

Finally, the fury spent itself and Masonry found itself disrupted and well nigh destroyed. For instance, in 1825 there were 480 lodges in New York State with a membership of 20,000. By 1830, the number had dropped to 82 lodges with but 3,000 members; the same sort of disaster happened everywhere else in the Eastern United States and to some extent in Canada and in Nova Scotia. But all this is a digression and has little to do with the story of our ritual; besides it is somewhat ahead of my story.

**THE ANCIENTS** - As the result of the publication of alleged exposes, the Grand Lodge of England about 1740 made some changes in the ritual especially in the Third Degree, the lectures were condensed, parts of the ceremonies were omitted or cut down, some minor additions were made, and most important of all the symbolism of preparation was essentially changed.

Ten years later a new Grand Lodge was formed in London which asserted that it and the Grand Lodges of Scotland and Ireland were adherents of pure and Ancient Masonry and that the other Grand Lodge had made unauthorized changes in the ritual, and they dubbed the older group "Moderns", and styled themselves the "Ancients".

Between these two Grand Lodges there developed a bitter rivalry, each propagating its own ritual. The "Ancients" (that is the younger Grand Lodge) was the most active in spreading its principles and extending its jurisdiction and soon dominated the American Colonies. Each endeavoured to elaborate and enrich its ritual. Nova Scotia and Quebec were brought up on the "Ancient" ritual, sometimes called "Ancient York".

PRESTON - One of the great authorities on F.M. in this period was William Preston, born in Edinburgh in 1742. After being apprenticed as a printer he went to London where his literary skill made him the friend of many of the distinguished writers of his day.

In London in 1762 some of his Scottish friends founded a lodge and he was the second person initiated. He was eventually elected Master and about this time, began the study and elaboration of the lectures. He went everywhere for instruction in ritual, and because of his retentive memory, his extensive Masonic connection, and his diligent research, soon became an outstanding authority on the subject. In 1772, after ten years of patient work, he delivered a series of orations on Masonry which were afterwards published under the title of "illustrations of Masonry".

This invaluable work went through many editions in England and in the United States. After a distinguished career in Masonry, he died in 1818 and was buried in St. Paul's Cathedral.

His work was more in the nature of a monitor than of a ritual, as we understand that term, but it undoubtedly exerted a wide influence in standardizing the work particularly the lectures and charges.

MONITORS - Monitors are manuals which contain the charges, general regulations, emblems and an account of public ceremonies. American works of this class contain more instruction than do English monitors but neither contains as much as the French and German manuals. The best known are those of Preston 1771; Webb 1797; Dalcho 1807; Charles W. Moore 1846; Dove 1847; Mackey 1852; Macoy 1853; Sickels 1866.

WEBB - The man who did the most to clear up the confusion that existed in the United States was Thomas Smith Webb. A native of Boston, he lived in New Hampshire, New York and Rhode Island and died in Cleveland, Ohio in 1819. Made a Mason in 1792, he immediately began an intensive study of the ritual, and

five years later published his famous "Monitor" or "Illustrations of Masonry", work which has played a dominant part in the development of what came to be known as the American Rite. His Monitor was based on Preston's "Illustrations of Masonry". He was the ablest Masonic ritualist of his day and his work was for the next thirty years the only guide used in the American Craft.

**THE UNITED GRAND LODGE OF ENGLAND** - To return to England; the Grand Lodge of the "Ancients" was very insistent on the subject of uniformity of work so that "Ancient Masonry may be preserved and handed down unchanged to posterity". Its ritual differed in many respects from that of its rival, the Grand Lodge of the "Moderns".

In 1813, these two rival Grand Lodges were united under the title of the United Grand Lodge of England and in the Articles of Union we find several references to the need "of establishing and securing uniformity of working", and at the union, an equal number of brethren were selected from the two Grand Lodges for the purpose of effecting uniformity of Ritual.

Eventually this Committee agreed upon the working and in May 1816, the ceremonies were exemplified before the Grand Lodge and a month later were approved and confirmed.

**LODGE OF EMULATION** - The most prominent of the brethren responsible for this movement were Peter Gilkes and Edward Harper, the latter, the Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of England.

In 1823, the Emulation Lodge of Improvement No. 256 was founded by these two brethren and others to carry on instruction in ceremonial work and to maintain the standard of working approved by Grand Lodge. The Lodge of Emulation has continued its work to the present day, under the control of a Committee of Preceptors; vacancies caused by death have been filled by new recruits of well-tried accuracy. The Emulation Lodge of Improvement derives no authority from the Grand Lodge of England and is not recognized by the Constitution. Its authority is purely moral and traditional. No lodge in England is obliged to conform to the Emulation working, but the fact remains that the great majority of English lodges practice the Emulation working. Another "work" practised is that of the Lodge of Stability; not by many lodges; and none of these other rituals differs essentially from that of the Lodge of Emulation.

May I add that the Lodge of Emulation work without the secret work is readily obtainable, printed in plain English, as is the official ritual of the Grand Lodge of Scotland.

At the beginning of F.M. in America there was much confusion due, first, to the difficulties of communication between the Grand Lodges in England, Scotland and Ireland and their lodges in America; secondly, to the lack of books, especially monitors, and lastly, to the hesitation most Masons had of putting down on paper the ceremonies of a Masonic Lodge.

In the middle of the century, between 1740 to 1760, there were many portions and clauses in the F.C. degree which are now found only in the Third Degree today, for instance, the five points of fellowship. Again some parts of our present day F.C. degree were then to be found in the First Degree.

Today in the United States there are at least twenty four different rituals. Each of the 49 jurisdictions has an undisputed and sovereign right to adopt any changes it may wish to make in its standard work. These rituals fall into groups or families; the first group comprises the rituals of New England and many Atlantic Coast States, some based on the ritual of the "Moderns" as in New England and Georgia; others on that of the "Ancients" as in New York, and others combining both elements. The second group comprises Ohio, North Carolina, Michigan, Maine, Tennessee, and other States. Missouri is to be found in the third group or family and in the fourth or western family or group, we find California and other Pacific Coast States.

**CANADIAN RITUAL** - In Canada, the Grand Lodge of "Canada" in the Province of Ontario, adopted a Canadianized version of the Emulation working; other jurisdictions have been influenced by both "Ancient" and "Modern" traditions and in all of them you will find American work based on the ritual of some American jurisdiction, such as New York or Massachusetts. Those who visit other Masonic lodges in Canada and the United States see a variety of ritual, although the same spirit inspires it all. Every Lodge has its own traditional way of doing things. It is one of the charms of visiting lodges that one notes these little diversities, all carried through without transgressing any Landmarks or without the introduction of innovations.

**CIPHERS** - One of the banes of Masonry is the increasing output of cipher rituals which flood the market. The young Mason has not been told what is the standard work and he buys at some bookstore what some brother frequently from

another lodge tells him contains the "work". To add to the confusion, a brother who trusts a cipher as his guide, mistranslates some of the characters or initial letters and the result is worse than if he had none. I am able to cite many examples of mistranslation; nearly all Grand Lodges in Canada and the United States have condemned in the strongest terms the publication of ciphers or aids to memory of any portion of the ritual, and forbidden their use.

**SCHOOLS OF INSTRUCTION** - As an antidote to all this confusion, schools of instruction are sometimes set up under Grand Lodge auspices "to exemplify the standard work" and to purify the wording of the ceremonies and thus bring about some degree of uniformity.

Most jurisdictions appoint Grand Lecturers, for a similar purpose, but their services are seldom called for, and in some instances their appointment is evidently for the purpose of conferring rank in Grand Lodge, rather than to set up a standard in the ritual work

**NOVA SCOTIA** - One of the most important services rendered by the late George D. Macdougall was the writing of the history of our ritual in Nova Scotia, this will be found in our Proceedings for the year 1939 page 48. Our present Grand Lodge was formed in 1866, by the Scottish Lodges of the Province; when in 1869, the lodges of English allegiance came into the Grand Lodge, a committee was appointed "to report on the system of work adopted by the various lodges with the view of establishing uniformity therein."

This committee reported in 1870 recommending the work styles "Ancient York Rite" except that the lodges now working the ritual of the Grand Lodges of England and Canada have full permission to continue that work as long as they desire to do so." This later became part of the Constitution.

In 1872, the Grand Lecturer, Mewell Snow, of Queen's Lodge No. 34 exemplified the Third Degree and in 1875, the First and Third Degrees were exemplified under the direction of F.W. Dakin (of Welsford Lodge No. 26) Grand Lecturer, using on both occasions as the record says "the established ritual".

In 1904, the three degrees were exemplified before Grand Lodge by members of Truro Lodge No. 43 and again in 1906, following which it was resolved "that Grand Lodge adopt the work as exemplified by the committee, i.e. the Ancient York Rite as practised in New York, as the authorized work of this Grand Lodge",

but the right enjoyed by several loges of continuing to the English or Canadian work was continued to them by the Constitution.

In 1918, three custodians of the work "were appointed and in 1921, "a complete ritual of all the degrees including the opening and closing of lodge," was submitted to Grand Lodge, this book we now have.

The situation may be summed up as follows; Grand Lodge has on several occasions declared that it officially recognizes two rituals in this jurisdiction, one, the Ancient York Rite as practiced in the State of New York; and the other the English Lodge of Emulation work in use in two or three of our lodges.

There is no doubt as to what the Emulation work is, for it is printed in plain English and obtainable through proper sources.

I found when Grand Master that apart from the Emulation work, there were eleven "rituals" in use in this Province, each claiming to be the York Rite, so called, some of them unreliable exposes, others undoubtedly unauthorized versions of the same Rite.

All of them cannot be the standard, official and authorized work. I have myself witnessed degrees in most of the lodges of the jurisdiction and I say, without hesitation that we should lose no time in getting back to a standard, otherwise the confusion will be far worse than it is today. Motions have been made in Grand Lodge to send a delegation to New York to obtain a certified copy of the work or to witness its exemplification there, but such resolutions have failed to pass.

It is my hope that we can some day obtain more official information respecting "the Ancient York Rite as practised in the State of New York" so that we may have a more reliable guide and standard than we now have, for the 82 lodges which use that work.

In my address to Grand Lodge as Grand Master in 1935, I said: "Because of the existence of unauthorized rituals, cyphers and exposes in this jurisdiction, and the corruptions that have crept into the work we should as a Grand Lodge boldly embark upon the publication of an authorized ritual or standard work printed in plain English. I do not for one moment suggest that the secret work should be printed nor the means of recognition explained or illustrated. They will continue to



be imparted as now, for our ob. prevents us from printing anything whatever "Whereby the secrets of F.M. may be obtained."

Let us follow the example of the English Lodge of Emulation, the Grand Lodge of Scotland, our own Grand Lodge in publishing the ceremonies of the Board of Installed Masters; the Grand Lodge of Alberta, the Grand Chapters of Canada and Nova Scotia, the Knights Templar Order in Canada, the United States and everywhere else, the Scottish Rite and other branches of F.M. and publish what we publish in plain English, so that there can be no mistranslation of a cypher or abbreviation and not dispute as to what may be the ritual.

I realize that there may be a few who would be unwilling to learn what to them may be something slightly different, but I am confident that if we adopt a settled standard ritual, print it and distribute it to our lodges under very strict safeguards; we shall have uniformity everywhere, within a very short time. There would be many opportunities for those who now use slightly differently worded charges to participate in our degree work. We should make it impossible to obtain our standard work at any bookstore, but only through the Grand Secretary's office, and the Emulation work should also be obtainable in the same way.

The Grand Lecturer would then be expected to assume some responsibility in seeing that lodges were properly coached and advised as to the correct ritual and ceremony.

In the course of time we would wonder why we argued for seventy-five years over this rather simple problem.