

## EVOLUTION OF THE RITUAL

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### MASONRY GETS ORGANIZED

How was the somewhat confused history of the building industry, the trade regulations, and the moral precepts of Operative Masons, together with rather crude usage and phrases associated with the imparting the Mason Word, modified and elaborated as ultimately to justify the claim of Freemasonry to be a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols? It is a long journey of very wise ancestors whose names we may never know, and their wisdom to make Masonry relevant and meaningful to the times in which they lived.

In June 1717 four London lodges met to form a Grand Lodge. At this time it was a radical concept introduced into Masonry. Masonry had only two degrees, that of the Entered Apprentice and Fellow of the Craft. There was no ritual, no laws for governance or edicts, by-laws, constitutions, or jurisdiction. It took almost the rest of the eighteenth century for most of this to happen. The Grand Lodge was formed and they met quarterly, but no minutes of these meetings were kept until 1723 when Rev. Anderson presented the first set of Constitutions. Brother George Bell was a Deputy Grand Master in 1751 and had not progressed beyond the degree of Fellow Craft.

Let us see what some of the practices were in those early days of organized Masonry. Lodges governed themselves by the "Old Charges" or the "Manuscript Constitutions" dating from the *Regius Manuscript*, c. 1390. About 130 of the Old Charges have been found, the last was found in 1954 and is called the *Kewan MS*, c. 1714. More than 75 of these documents are dated before 1717. Of the Old Charges, most are preserved in England and Scotland, four are in US (Boston and Philadelphia) and one is in Canada.

The Old Charges can be divided into eight distinct families but they all followed a general pattern, which was:

- a. Opening prayer.
- b. A reading of the legendary history of the Craft going back to Biblical times. This was fabricated history, but it provided a traditional background for long standing customs. These histories contained Charges, singular and general, designed to preserve and elevate the moral character of the Craftsmen.
- c. Code of Moral and Trade Regulation.
- d. Oath or obligation.
- e. Arrangements for Annual Assemblies.
- f. Procedure for Admission of New Members.
- g. Procedure for Trial and Punishment.

## PETITION, INVESTIGATION, AND BALLOTING

There were no petitions, committees, or balloting on candidates. Names were recommended member; those present discussed the merits of the candidate and agreed to admit him in the Craft. There was no waiting time before a degree was conferred and no interval between the first and second degrees, in fact the Fellow Craft degree was conferred on the same evening. It was mandated in 1777 that the Entered Apprentice and Fellow Craft degrees be conferred on different evenings.

## MAKING A MASON

The first evidence of two degrees is found in 1598. It is in 1725 that we find the first evidence of a Master Mason Degree. Early lodges met in taverns only for the purpose of making masons. The admission ceremony was in the form of a feast and was the same for the Apprentice and Fellow Craft. It consisted of an opening prayer followed by a reading of appropriate charges and regulations. Then the candidate took his oath, which was declaring his fidelity to the King, to the Master, Craft, and a promise that he would obey the regulations and not bring shame to the Craft. There were no penalties in these oaths. It was in 1593, according to the *Grand Lodge No.1 MS*, the third oldest of the Old Charges, we find the words, « one of the elders would hold out the Bible and he or they that are to be admitted shall place their hand thereon. " The word secrecy was first found in the *Edinburgh Register House MS, c. 1696.*" We also find that the obligation of the first and second degree was the same, the only difference was three words. The words, "without equivocation or mental reservation" first appear in *Sloane MS, c. 1700.* Penalties are first noticed in *Dumfries No. 4 MS, c. 1710,* where it says, "my heart taken out alive, my head cut off, my body buried within ye sea mark." At this time the penalties were not part of the obligation, but were included in the ritual that followed the oath. *The Grand Mystery of Freemasons Discovered, c. 1724* and *Wilkinson's MS, c. 1727,* but found in 1946, are found the words "...and help and assist any brother as far as your ability will allow. ..."

The Entered Apprentice obligation in 1727 follows the present form. The Master Mason obligation in *Three Distinct Knocks, c. 1760,* consists of only five paragraphs. In 1760, the penalties in the obligation are separated. It is quite clear that the admission ceremonies until the 1760's were brief, not performed in any set form of words/ritual except in the obligation, and that the theory and principles of the Order were subsequently conveyed to the novices through non-standardised lectures that brothers gave or read. During the latter part of the eighteenth century the ceremonies became more elaborate and took on the form that we know today. The ritualises that made the greatest impact on this transformation during the period of enlightenment were: William Hutchinson, Roland Calcott, and William Preston. Hutchinson philosophised and symbolised the ritual. Calcott improved on that and became the first of the "roving lecturers" teaching the lectures etc. He came to the US and among his pupils were Robert Livingston, Paul Revere, and Joseph Warren. He is credited with introducing "moral and social virtues" in the closing prayer, "subdue their passions and improve themselves in Masonry" and "it is the internal and not the external qualifications that make a man a Mason." Nobody had a greater influence than William Preston in England and Thomas Smith Webb in America. Today all Grand Lodges in the US, except Pennsylvania that follows the Irish form, follow the Preston-Webb form of lectures and ritual.

## OBLIGATIONS AND PENALTIES

*Dumfries MS, c. 1710.* I quote the oath, "The charges we now rehearse to you with all other charges and secrets otherwise belonging to free masons or any that enter their interest for curiosity together with the counsels of this holy lodge chamber, you shall not for any gift, bribe, or reward favor, or affection directly or indirectly, nor for any cause whatsoever divulge, disclose the same to either father, mother, sister, brother, children, stranger, or any other person whatsoever, so help you God."

In the charge that followed the oath, the candidate was admonished not to take another fellow's wife, daughter, or maid in adultery or fornication. He was urged to visit the sick, relieve the poor, not to steal, and not to call other masons disrespectful names. The candidate was directed to be true to God, the Holy Catholic Church, the King and his master.

OATH IN THE GRAND MYSTERY OF FREE MASONS DISCOVERED, C. 1724.

I quote, "You must serve God according to the best of your knowledge and institution, and be a true liege man to the king and help and assist any brother as far as your ability will allow. By the contents of this sacred writ you will perform this oath. So help you God." THERE IS STILL ONLY ONE OATH FOR BOTH DEGREES, NO PENALTIES ARE INCLUDED AND NO SPECIFIC POSTURE OF TAKING THE OATH.

It is in 1760 that a separate obligation appears for each degree and each obligation has integral to it its penalty. During this period we also find formalised opening and closing ceremonies, preparations of candidates in different degrees, symbolised working tools, presentation of apron in degrees, circumambulation ceremony for calling the lodge from labor to refreshment. The first evidence of a lecture on charity is in the 1770's and we find the traditional third degree history lecture at about the same time.

## PRACTICES IN LOUISIANA IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

I learned that lodges conducted all the business in the Entered Apprentice Degree in Louisiana until the union of the two Grand Lodges in 1850. The first recorded examination of a candidate was in 1850. In 1812, the Grand Lodge of Louisiana ordered its constituent lodges to procure three copies of the ritual from the Grand Secretary. In 1823, our Grand Lodge was opened in New Orleans in the Entered Apprentice Degree to receive General Lafayette who visited as a Guest of the Nation.

## CONCLUSION

The ritual that we have inherited has undergone countless changes in the last three hundred years. Wise men made changes as they thought were needed. The practices in the lodge have changed continuously over the centuries. Then why do we suspect our leaders today that advocate changes? Brethren, let us support our leadership so Masonry can keep moving ahead.

