

## RITUAL DIFFERENCES

An experience in Freemasonry usually upsetting to the newly-Raised brother is his first visit to a Lodge in another Jurisdiction than his own.

Having carefully been taught a certain ritual, in all probability with positive emphasis upon the necessity of being "letter perfect", he learns with a distinct shock that the ritual in other Constitutions differs from his own, and that these differ each from the other.

If he converses with those "WELL INFORMED BRETHERN WHO WILL ALWAYS BE AS READY TO GIVE AS YOU WILL BE TO RECEIVE INSTRUCTION" he is more than apt to be met with a puzzled, "I don't know, I'm sure, just why they are different from us, but, of course, ours is correct."

The riddle becomes much plainer as the neophyte studies Masonic history - but, alas, many never open a Masonic book! Yet divergences in ritual cannot be understood without some historical background.

Prior to 1731, at a time when English ritual was in process of formation, we did not receive our Masonry from one central source, but from several. The schism in the first Grand Lodge in England (1753) resulted in two Grand Lodges; the "Ancients" (the younger, schismatic body) and the "Moderns" (the older, original Grand Lodge). Each had its own ritual; our rituals sometimes lean to one, sometimes to the other, and often to both.

Literal ritualism is comparatively a modern matter; and "mouth to ear" in early days meant nothing more than the giving of information, not transmitting it in a set form of words.

Grand Lodges have not infrequently changed, added to and taken from their own rituals, either as a matter of legislation or by the easier course (in early days) of adopting with little or no question the variations suggested by positive minded ritualists.

Certain fundamentals are to all intents and purposes the same in every Lodge. They all have a Master and two Wardens, a Secretary and Treasurer, and Altar with the V.S.L. and the other Great Lights; lesser lights, three degrees; unanimous ballot required; make Masons only of men; have the same Substitute Word given in the same way; are tiled; have a ceremony of opening and closing. To some extent all dramatize and exemplify the Master's Degree, although the amount of drama and exemplification differs widely.

But beyond these and a few other simple essentials are wide variations. Aprons are worn one way in one degree in one Constitution and another way in the same degree in another. Some Constitutions have more officers in a Lodge than others. In some Jurisdictions Lodges have the Lesser Lights grouped closely about the Altar, in a triangle to one side of the Altar, in the stations of the Master

and Wardens. In some Lodges the I.P.M. (Immediate Past Master) plays an important part, as in England. Other Lodges know him not.

Some Lodges have Inner Guards and two Masters of Ceremonies - others will have none of these. Obligations show certain similarities in some requirements; but what is a part of the obligation in one Constitution may be merely an admonition in another, and vice versa.

Discovering all this (and much more!) the thoughtful initiate is apt to wonder why it is deemed so important that he memorize his own particular "work" so closely; when he travels he finds that what he knows as familiar words and forms and phrases are strange to the Lodges he visits.

There are good and sufficient reasons why we should hand on to our sons and their sons the ritual as we received it - if only to preserve without further alteration and change that which was formed by the fathers. Suffice it that while uniformity in work within Constitutions is fairly well established, it is not universal.

There are several "workings" for instance, permitted in English Lodges, and even in some American Jurisdictions (vide Connecticut) not all Lodges use the same ritual. The reason for all this are so involved, complex and cover such a long period, that a complete understanding is difficult even for the student willing to read the enormous amount of history and authority which may make it plain. Briefly, and in general, the matter becomes clearer if we visualize our sources of ritual.

We receive our Masonry from pre-Grand Lodge era Lodges of England, Ireland and (or) Scotland and

The Mother Grand Lodge of England 1717-1753

The Grand Lodge of Ireland 1724 and on

The Grand Lodge of Scotland 1736 and on

The Grand Lodge of the "Ancients" 1753-1813

The Grand Lodge of the "Moderns". 1753-1813

The United Grand Lodge 1813 and on

Unfortunately for the Historian, this list does not signify six or seven springs from which ritual welled in six or seven different but "pure" forms. The ritual of the original Grand Lodge changed as it flowed, through many years after 1717. The Grand Lodges of "Ancients" and "Moderns" both made alterations in ritual so that rival members of each body found it impossible to make themselves known Masonically in the other. Ireland and "Scotland were, and are, as different as Pennsylvania and California.

The Mother Grand Lodge ritual (1717 to 1753) was not the ritual of the United Grand Lodge, which came into existence in 1813, when the two parts of the original Mother Grand Lodge ("Ancients" and "Moderns") again came together. The United Grand Lodge, or Grand Lodge of Reconciliation, formed its ritual from the best of the divergent rituals of the "Ancients" and the "Moderns".

By that time the ritual was more or less fixed, because of the reverence of the average Mason for what he is taught, and his fierce resentment of any material change in that which he learns, rituals and degree forms, ceremonies and practices, usages and customs, continue to be what he believes them to have been "from time immemorial" even when sober fact shows that they have an antiquity of (in all probability) less than two hundred years.

For the benefit of those Masons to whom divergence of ritual is not the less distressing that it is understandable, it may be said that most authorities agree that it is really not a matter of great moment. All over the world Freemasonry teaches the same great truths, offers the same spiritual comfort, creates and continues the same fraternal bond.

"In nonessentials, variety;  
in essentials, unity"

might have been written of Masonry. It matters little how we wear the apron in given degree - so be it that it is worn with honor. The method of giving a sign or a pass matter much less than that what we do is done with understanding.

While Freemasonry continues to observe and revere those few Landmarks which are undisputed everywhere - those which Joseph Fort Newton says are "The fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of Man, the Moral Law, the Golden Rule, and the hope of Life Everlasting," it becomes of less moment that different men, in different times, in different localities, have found more than one way to phrase and to teach the ancient verities of the old, old craft.