

THE WEBB RITUAL IN THE UNITED STATES

BY BRO. SILAS H. SHEPHERD, WISCONSIN

The Builder, Jun 1916

THE year 1717 will ever stand out as a prominent date in the history of Freemasonry. Since then we have voluminous written and printed records; before then we had but about a hundred old manuscript charges, a few mentions of Freemasonry in biography and laws, and a very few lodge minutes.

Previous to 1717, the rituals, or forms and ceremonies of reception of candidates and other work of the lodge, were most probably given in the language and manner the presiding officer chose. It may have been in a "set form of words," which form was transmitted orally from one generation to another.

Soon after the "revival," or the organization of the Grand Lodge in 1717, Rev. James Anderson, the author of the "Book of Constitutions" of 1723, and Dr. John T. Desaguliers, the master mind of the organization, arranged the lectures into the form of questions and answers for the first time, and this was adopted by the Grand Lodge as the authentic lectures. (1)

In 1732, Martin Clare revised the lectures and made a few Christian applications which were not in strict conformity to the cosmopolitan character of the fraternity. Dr. Thos. Manningham and Thos. Dunkery were the next to "improve the work" and Dr. Manningham's prayer is still used, with slight modifications in opening a lodge and at the reception of candidates. Thos. Dunkery is said to have given the theological ladder its three principal rounds. In 1763, Wm. Hutchinson again revised and "improved" the lectures and gave more Christian applications to their rites and ceremonies. (2)

The greatest of all ritualists, however, was William Preston who was made a Mason in a lodge of "Antients," in 1763, and soon after induced that lodge to be reconstituted by the "Moderns." In 1767 he became master of his lodge. He believed that Freemasonry should not only be a progressive moral science, but that it should have an educational value in giving its votaries more knowledge of the liberal arts and sciences. His "Illustrations of Masonry" was the result, and no book having more influence has

ever been written on Masonry. He was the father of the monitor. By 1774 he had completed his system of "work" and established a school of instruction, and from that time to the present the Preston "work" has been, and undoubtedly far into the future it will continue to be, one of the most potent influences of the ritual. Preston's "work" continued to be the standard work for the Grand Lodge of England until 1813, when the "United Grand Lodge" adopted the Hemming lectures. The Hemming lectures differ in many particulars from the Preston. The Preston lectures are still given once a year in England under the auspices of a foundation made for that purpose.

When Freemasonry was first established in America is an open question. We are not quite sure that the stone with the date 1606 is really a Masonic stone of that date, or that Mordecai Campanell and his companions conferred the degrees of Masonry in 1656 at Newport, R. I. (3) Neither are we certain as to where Freemasonry was first practiced in this country by authority of the Grand Lodge of England after 1717. It is, however, well known that lodges were established in the colonies and that Daniel Coxe, Henry Price and James Graeme were issued deputations as Provincial Grand Masters.

The ritual of the English lodges would naturally have been the one used in the English colonies, and in this connection it is well to call attention to the fact that the "Grand Lodge of England according to the old Institutions," or "Ancients," was established in 1751, and from that time until 1813 chartered lodges in all the colonies. In many of the colonies there were two conflicting Provincial Grand Lodges.

In the establishment of the "Ancient" Grand Lodge changes were made which were of considerable importance. (4) Uniformity was not accomplished in England until 1813, and it has not yet been attained, and probably never will be attained, in America. Pennsylvania still retains the "Ancient work."

After the Colonies had declared their independence of Great Britain, the Provincial Grand Lodges naturally declared their independence of the Grand Lodges to which they owed their origin. Each was then a sovereign Grand Lodge.

To return to the lectures; they took the form of the place whence they came, and were quite probably not transmitted with a great degree of accuracy, and were not very uniform in the United States at the close of the Eighteenth century.

Thos. Smith Webb was born in Boston, Mass., October 13, 1771, and became a printer or book binder. Early in life he became a Mason and a teacher of Masonry. In 1797 he published the "Freemason's Monitor." He subsequently did more for Masonry than almost any one else in his day, and was probably personally instrumental in founding the "American Rite," or system of degrees of Royal Arch, Council and Commandery. What we are particularly interested in, however, is his connection with ancient craft Masonry.

About the close of the eighteenth century a printer named Hanmer came to America and brought the Preston work. He communicated it to Webb. Soon afterward Webb abridged it, arranged it differently, as to sections, and taught this revision to Benjamin Gleason, Henry Fowle, Bro. Snow, and others. In 1806 a joint committee of six, of which Bros. Gleason and Fowle were members, met and agreed upon the Webb work as the standard work of Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Bro. Jeremy Cross claimed to have received his work from this committee. (5) In an address before the Grand Lodge of Vermont in 1859 G. M. Philip Tucker gave much valuable information from which we excerpt the following:

"About the year 1800--twelve years after the publication of Preston's Illustrations an English brother, whose name I have been unable to obtain, came to Boston and taught the English Lectures as they had been arranged by Preston. The Grand Lodge of Massachusetts approved them and they were taught by Thomas S. Webb and Henry Fowle, of Boston, and Brother Snow, of Rhode Island. About the year 1801, Brother Benjamin Gleason, who was a student of Bro. Webb, received them from him, and embodied them in a private key of his own. About the year 1805, Bro. Gleason was employed by the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts to teach all the Subordinate Lodges of that jurisdiction, and was paid for that service, fifteen hundred dollars. To those lectures the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts still adheres, with a very slight variation in the Fellow Craft and Master's Degree. Bro. Snow afterwards changed and modified the Lectures he had received--mingling with them some changes from other sources--so that the system of lectures descending through him, is not reliable.

"Bro. Gleason was appointed Grand Lecturer of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts in 1805, and that Grand Lodge appointed no other Grand Lecturer until 1842. He was a liberally educated man; graduated at Brown University in 1802, and was a public lecturer on geography and astronomy. He was a member of Mount Lebanon Lodge, in Massachusetts, in 1807, and died in Concord in that State, in 1847, at the age of 70. He visited England and exemplified the Preston Lectures as he had received them from Bro. Webb, before the Grand Lodge of England, and the Masonic authorities of that Grand Body pronounced them correct. In the year 1817, Bro. John Barney, formerly of Charlotte, Vermont, went to Boston and received the Preston Lectures there as taught by Gleason, and as they were approved by the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts.

"I am unable to say whether he received them from Bro. Gleason himself, or from Bro. Henry Fowle. My impression is that he received them from Bro. Fowle. In possession of these Lectures he returned to Vermont, and at the Annual Communication of our Grand Lodge in October, 1817, visited that Grand Body and made known the fact. The subject was submitted to a committee for examination, which reported that these Lectures were according to the most approved method of Work in the United States, and proposed to give Bro. Barney letters of recommendation to all Lodges and brethren, wherever he may wish to travel, as a brother well qualified to give useful Masonic information to any one who may wish his services.

"The Grand Lodge accepted and adopted the report of its committee, and Bro. Barney, under the recommendation thus given, visited many of the then existing Lodges of this State, and imparted to them a knowledge of these Lectures. Among others, in the year 1818, he visited Dorchester Lodge, in Vergennes, and imparted full instructions in them to Right Worshipful Samuel Wilson, now and for several years past, Grand Lecturer of this State. Upon this occasion Bro. Barney wrote out a portion of them in private key, and Bro. Wilson wrote out the remainder. Both were written in the same book, and that part written by Bro. Wilson was examined carefully and approved by Bro. Barney. That original manuscript is still in existence, and is now in possession of my son, Bro. Philip C. Tucker, Jr., of Galveston, Texas, to whom Bro. Wilson presented it a few years ago. Bro. Wilson has a perfect copy of it, and refers to it as authority in all cases of doubt. Bro. Gallup, of Liberty Lodge, at Franklin, was one of the original Grand

Lodge committee, and is still living to attest the correctness and identity of these Lectures as taught by Barney, in 1817.

"These are the only Lectures which have been sanctioned in this jurisdiction, from October, 1817, to the present day. The Grand Lodge has sanctioned no others. My predecessors, Grand Masters Robinson, Whitney, Whales and Haswell, sustained them against all innovations, and to the extent of my power I have done the same. I think upon these facts I am justified in saying that the Lectures we use are the true Lectures of Preston.

"Webb changed the arrangement of the sections as fixed by Preston. for one which he thought more simple and convenient, but, as I understand, he left the body of the Lectures themselves as Preston had established them. Subsequently to 1818, Bro. Barney went to the western and southwestern States; he was a man in feeble health at the time, and pursued Masonic lecturing as a means of subsistence. Upon his return to this State, a few years afterwards. he stated to his brethren here--as I have been credibly informed and believe-- that he found different systems of lecturing prevailing at the west and south-west, and that, upon presenting the Lectures he had been taught at Boston in 1817, to different Grand Masters, they were objected to, and that various Grand Masters would not sanction his lecturing in their jurisdictions, unless he would teach the Lectures then existing among them, that desiring to pursue his occultation, he did learn the different systems of lecturing then existing in the different States, and taught them in the different State jurisdictions, as desired by the different Grand Masters in each. This circumstance accounts for the strange disagreement between the east and west and south-west as to what are the true Barney Lectures. They meant one thing in New England and another in the west."

Again, in 1861, he says: "Bro. Gleason was appointed Grand Lecturer of Massachusetts in 1805 and no other Grand Lecturer was appointed by that Grand Lodge until 1842. During all this time Bro. Fowle was a member, sometimes a subordinate officer, and occasionally Master of St. Andrew's Lodge of Boston, one of the oldest and best informed Lodges in the world. For most of this time, also, Bro. Gleason was at home in Massachusetts, and holding his office of Grand Lecturer of his

State. Is it not a very violent presumption to assume that he did not know what Lectures and what kind of Work were taught in one of the strongest Lodges of Boston.

"I knew Bro. Henry Fowle from my boyhood. My father was one of his intimate friends, and they were members and officers of the same Charter. Bro. Fowle was a man of far more mind and attainments than are usually found among men of his sphere of life. His was not a mind to forget anything, and was too tenacious a Mason to make changes without authority. But setting all inferences from such considerations aside, I remark, that I was present at St. Andrew's Lodge in 1823 or 1824. AND SAW THE WORK DONE, BRO. FOWLE TAKING PART IN IT THAT EVENING AS A SUBORDINATE OFFICER, AND THE WORK WAS IDENTICALLY THAT WHICH HAS BEEN PRACTICED IN THIS JURISDICTION FROM 1818 TO THIS DAY. AS EXEMPLIFIED IN THE LECTURES COMMUNICATED TO WILSON BY BARNEY. I add also, that I was subjected, upon another occasion, to a thorough examination, in an ante-room of the same Masonic hall, upon a visit to St. Andrew's Chapter, by a strong examining committee, which, finding that I answered readily, ran through the Lectures ENTIRE from entered apprentice to Royal Arch, and that the whole of them were IDENTICAL with those in use in the Lodges and Chapters of Vermont. There can be no doubt, then, that the Lectures communicated by Fowle to Barney were the genuine Lectures taught by Webb and Gleason, the same which Gleason received from Webb in 1801 or 1802; the same which he taught as Grand Lecturer of Massachusetts, from 1805; the same that I found among the Boston Masons, in 1823 or 1824 and the very same which are taught there now.

"Was there any opportunity for them to be falsified in their translation from Barney to Wilson? Barney received them in 1817 and made private notes of them; in October of that year, he submitted them to the Grand Lodge of Vermont, and got its permission to teach them in this jurisdiction: he was well known here, was a man of integrity and had every motive of interest and honor to preserve them in their purity. In 1818--and before he had gone from the State to teach elsewhere at all--he imparted them to Bro. Wilson, having his original notes before him, and aiding that Brother in making a correct copy of them and when they came into use practically, they were found to exactly agree with

those used in the jurisdiction from which Bro. Barney received them. There seems no room for error or mistake here. The link in the chain of transmission is not broken at all."

The work of Webb was evidently well done, and in his life time there existed a fairly uniform method where he or his disciples taught. He died in 1819. Jeremy L. Cross published his "True Masonic chart" in 1819. It was the Webb monitor with the addition of a series of illustrations of the emblems. This feature has been copied in most monitors since.

The "Morgan excitement" in 1826 put Masonic activity to a disadvantage, and there was little done from 1826 to 1839 or thereabouts. Then there was a revival of interest and an agitation for uniform work resulting in the Baltimore Convention of 1843, at which the delegates adopted the "Webb work."

John Barney, of whom Philip Tucker speaks, was made a Mason in Friendship Lodge No. 20, at Charlotte, Vt., in 1811. After teaching the Webb work in Vermont he went west. He was Grand Lecturer in Ohio from 1836 to 1843, and Grand Lecturer of the Grand Lodge of Illinois in 1846 and 1847. He died at Peoria, Ill., June 22, 1847. He was the most influential ritualist of Vermont, Ohio and Illinois. Michigan and Wisconsin, and the states which have since become independent Masonically, derived their work from these, and follow the Barney work to the best of their knowledge.

John Barney was the delegate from Ohio to the Baltimore Convention of 1843. Charles W. Moore of Massachusetts, was also a delegate. In a letter written in 1863 he says:

"The work and lectures of the first three degrees, as adopted and authorized by the Baltimore Convention, in 1843, were, with a few unimportant verbal exceptions, literally as they were originally compiled by Bro. Thos. S. Webb, about the close of the last century, and as they were subsequently taught by him during his lifetime, and also by his early and favorite pupil, Bro. Benjamin Gleason, from the years 1801-2 until his death in 1847. In a note to me, under date of NOV. 25, 1843, Bro. Gleason says: 'It was my privilege while at Brown University, Providence, R.I., (1801-2) to acquire a complete knowledge of the lectures in the first three degrees of Masonry, directly from our late much lamented brother Thos. S. Webb.' In 1805 Bro. Gleason was commissioned by

the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts as its Grand Lecturer and empowered to visit and instruct the Lodges in the ritual, as he had received it from Bro. Webb. This duty he performed with great fidelity, and to the entire satisfaction of the Grand Lodge; and this ritual is in use in the lodges of Massachusetts at the present time. There may be some verbal departures from the original, but no material change has been made in it. In 1823-4 Bro. Gleason was my Masonic teacher. I learned the work and lectures of him. We were connected by family ties, and close Masonic relations continued to exist between us until his death in 1847. I was associated with him in all the various branches of Masonry for nearly a quarter of a century, and enjoyed all the rare advantages of his extensive and accurate knowledge of the various rituals of the different grades of the Order. In 1843 I was appointed by the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts a delegate to the Baltimore Masonic Convention, called for the purpose of revising the various modes of work then in use, and agreeing upon a uniform system for the country. Before leaving home, and as a preparation for the better discharge of the duties of the appointment, I availed myself of the assistance of Bro. Gleason, in a thorough and careful revision of the lectures, which I had originally received from him and which, on frequent occasions, I had been called to deliver and work with him, both in-and out of the Lodge. I was, therefore, qualified to report them to the convention, through its committee on the work, in their purity and integrity, and, beyond all doubt, just as they originally came from the hand of the late Bro. Webb. I had the honor to be a member of the committee, and to report the amendments, and the lectures as amended, to the convention. This I did without notes, but subsequently took the precaution to minute down the alterations from the original; and these are now in my possession. They are mostly verbal, few in number, and not material in their results. The only change of consequence was in the due guards of the second and third degrees, which were changed and made to conform to that of the first degree in position and explanation. This was analogically correct."

At this Baltimore Convention sixteen of the twenty-three then existing Grand Lodges of the United States were represented, and the "work" adopted was called the "National" or "Barney" work. No opposition of consequence to this work occurred until 1860, when Robert Morris tried to have a "Webb-Preston work as taught by Robert Morris" adopted through the medium of a Conservator's Association. This Conservator's Association

gained much influence and many brethren lent it their support. The plan was to have a conservator in each lodge who was to use his best efforts to promulgate the "Webb-Preston work as taught by Robert Morris." Each conservator was provided with a copy of "Mnemonics," which Robert Morris claimed was the true work.

The Grand Lodges, however, became alarmed and promptly condemned the Conservators; in the early 60's most of them passed resolutions reaffirming the work as handed down through Gleason, Barney, Wilson, Wadsworth, Cross and others, and as approved and recommended by the Baltimore Convention. Robert Morris claimed to have received the work from Bro. Wilson of Vermont; but Bro. Wilson says:

"In 1857 Robert Morris visited Vermont for the purpose of ascertaining what were the true Webb lectures. P. C. Tucker introduced Morris to me for the purpose, and I loaned him a copy (not my original) of my cipher, and which unfortunately had several omissions through mistake. In copying this, Morris made several mistakes and misread many passages. In fact he could never read it at all until I met him in Chicago in 1860, and I think he cannot read it all now. This copy, with its blunders and omissions, is the text from which the book you refer to (Mnemonics) was made."

If we are correct in judging the condition which prevailed from 1843, when the Baltimore Convention was held, until the time of the Conservator's Association, we would conclude that there was a difference in the work in the different Jurisdictions which made a Conservator movement possible. (6)

Robert Morris may have been sincerely desirous of promoting a uniform work and believed he could accomplish it; He probably could if he had possessed either the Preston work or the Webb work, but he had neither. His was a Morris work, and there had been too many changes to suit the Brethren, and from then until now the work adopted and maintained in the East and Northwest (7) has been as near the Webb work as our ritualists could ascertain, with the exception of Pennsylvania which still adheres to the "Ancient" work.

(1) See Mackey's Enc., Article Lectures, for simple questions and answers.

(2) See Hutchinson's "Spirit of Masonry."

- (3) History of Freemasonry and Concordant Orders, by Hughan, page 250.
- (4) A considerable difference of opinion exists as to what was done. See "Hughan's English Royal Arch." "Sadler's Reprints and Revelations."
- (5) We think this a rather improbable claim, as Bro. Cross was not made a Mason until 1808.
- (6) "Two text books, differing materially were issued, each claiming to be the work adopted. (By the Baltimore convention). I have heard a dozen variations of the lectures, each declared to be such as were agreed upon at Baltimore." A. T. C. Pierson, G. M., Minn., 1858.
- (7) I am uninformed as to the South and Southwest.

----O----