

CHAPTER 8

THE PRIESTHOOD OF MASONRY

From an issue of a local newspaper the following is quoted:

"York Rite Masons of Utah will assemble Monday and Tuesday in Provo for the annual meetings. All sessions will be held in the Masonic temple.

"The grand chapter of Royal Arch will hold its twentieth annual convocation Monday, the meeting opening at 10 a. m.

"The Grand council of Royal and Select Masters will assemble at 4 p. m., with the council of the order of High Priesthood meeting at 8 p. m."

It is obvious from the above that an order of High Priesthood exists in the Masonic organization.

"PRIEST: In the primitive ages of the world every father was the priest of his family, and offered prayer and sacrifice for his household. So, too, the patriarch exercised the same function.

"Melchizedek is called the priest of the most high God; and everywhere in scripture we find the patriarch performing the duties of prayer and sacrifice. But when political society was organized, a necessity was found in the wants of the people for a separate class who should become, as they have been described, the mediators between men and God, and the interpreters of the will of God to man. Hence arose the sacerdotal class—the cohen among the Hebrews, the hieres among the Greeks, and the sacerdos among the Romans.

"Thereafter prayer and sacrifice were entrusted to these, and the people paid them reverence for the sake of the deities whom they served. Ever since, in all countries, the distinction has existed between the priest and the layman, as representatives of two distinct classes.

"But Masonry has preserved its religious ceremonies, as in many other uses, the patriarchal spirit. Hence the Master of the Lodge, like the father of a primitive family, on all occasions,

offers up prayer, and serves at the altar. A chaplain is sometimes, through courtesy, invited to perform the former duty, but the Master is really the priest of the Lodge. Having then such solemn duties to discharge, and sometimes, as on funeral occasions, in public, it becomes every Master so to conduct his life and conversation, as not, by contrast, to make his ministration of a sacred office repulsive to those who see and hear him, and especially to profane.

"It is not absolutely required that he should be a religious man, resembling the clergyman in seriousness of deportment; but in his behavior he should be an example of respect for religion.

"He who at one time drinks to intoxication, or indulges in profane swearing, or obscene or vulgar language, is unfit at any other time to conduct religious services of a society.

"Such a Master could inspire the members of his Lodge with no respect for the ceremonies he was conducting; and if the occasion was a public one, as at the burial of a brother, the circumstance would subject the Order which could tolerate such incongruous exhibition to contempt and ridicule."

"**GRAND HIGH PRIEST:** The presiding officer of a Royal Arch chapter of the American system. The powers and prerogatives of a Grand High Priest are far more circumscribed than those of a Grand Master. As the office has been constitutionally created by the Grand Chapter, and did not precede it as that of Grand Master did the Grand Lodge, he possesses no inherent prerogatives, but those only which are derived from and delegated to him by the Constitution of the Grand Chapter and regulations formed under it for the government of Royal Arch Masonry."

"**GRAND CHAPTER:** A Grand Chapter consists of The High Priests, Kings, and Scribes." (Mackey, p. 318.)

"Prior to 1797 there was no organization of Grand Chapters in the United States. In 1798, at Hartford, a Grand Chapter was formed, a Constitution was adopted and officers elected and installed under it.

"**HIGH PRIEST:** The presiding officer of a Chapter of Royal Arch Masons according to the American system. His title is 'Most Excellent' and he represents Joshua, who was the son of Josedech, and the High Priest of the Jews when they returned from the Babylonian exile.

"He is seated in the east, and clothed in the apparel of the ancient High Priest of the Jews. He wears a robe of blue, purple, scarlet and white linen, and is decorated with a breastplate

and mitre. On the front of the mitre is inscribed the words, 'Holiness to the Lord.' His jewel is a mitre." (Mackey, p. 338.)

HIGH PRIESTHOOD, ORDER OF: "This order is a honorarium to be bestowed upon the High Priest of a Royal Arch Chapter in the United States, and consequently no one is legally entitled to receive it until he has been duly elected to preside as High Priest in a regular Chapter of Royal Arch Masons.

"It should not be conferred when a less number than three duly qualified High Priests are present.

"Whenever the ceremony is performed in ample form, the assistance of at least nine High Priests, who have received it, is requisite. The General Grand Chapter of the United States have decided that although it is highly expedient that every High Priest should receive the order, yet its possession is not essentially necessary as a qualification for the discharge of his official duties.

"The jewel of the degree consists of a plate of gold in the form of a triple triangle, a breastplate being placed over the point of the union.

"It is impossible, from the want of authentic documents, to throw much light upon the historical origin of this degree. No allusion to it can be found in any ritual works out of America, nor even here anterior to about the end of the last and beginning of this century.

"Webb is the first to mention it, and gives it a place in the series of capitular degrees. The question has, however, been exhaustively examined by Brother William Hacker, Past Grand High Priest of Indiana, who has paid much attention to the subject of American Masonic archaeology.

"In a letter to the author in August, 1873, he has sought to investigate the origin of this Order, and I gladly avail myself of the result of his inquiries.

"Thomas Smith Webb, says Brother Hacker, in the final edition of his Monitor, published in 1797, makes no mention of it. But in the second edition, published in 1802, he gives monitorial ritual for the order; or, as he terms it, Observations on the Order of the High Priests.

"Now, I infer, as we find no mention of the Order in the edition of 1797, and a monitorial ritual appearing in the edition of 1802, that at some time between those dates we must look for the true origin of the Order. Turning then to the proceedings of the General Grand Chapter of the United States, we find that at the communication held in the City of Providence, in the State of Rhode Island, on the 9th day of January, 1799,

Benjamin Hurd, Jr., Thomas S. Webb, and James Harrison were appointed a committee to revise the Constitution, and report such alterations and amendments thereto as they shall find necessary to be made.

"The next day, January 10th, 1799, Webb, as chairman of the committee, submitted their report, which was adopted as reported. In Article IV of that Constitution, we find the forms for constituting new Chapters and installing High Priests fully laid down and provided for. In those forms, after certain ceremonies had been gone through with, all the companions, except High Priests and Past High Priests, are requested to withdraw, while the new High Priest is solemnly bound to the performance of his duties; and after the performance of other necessary ceremonies not proper to be written, they are permitted to return.

"Now, right here the question naturally arises, what were those necessary ceremonies not proper to be written? A few lines farther on we find this language laid down: In consequence of your cheerful acquiescence with the charges and regulations just recited, I now declare you duly installed and anointed High Priest of this new Chapter. Now do not the words 'and anointed' as here used, fully answer the question as to what those other necessary ceremonies were? It seems so to me.

"Upon this theory, then, we have Thomas Smith Webb, his associates on the committee, Benjamin Hurd, Jr., and James Harrison, as the authors of the Order. It was adopted by the General Grand Chapter on the 10th day of January, 1799, when it became a part of the constitutional requirements of Royal Arch Masonry, so far, at least, as the authority of the General Grand Chapter extended.

"Following this matter out, we find that this provision of the Constitution was retained until the Triennial Communication held in the City of Lexington, Kentucky, on the 19th day of September, 1853, when, on motion of Companion Gould, the section was repealed; thus leaving the Order of the High Priesthood the exclusive property of those who were in possession of it.

"Where these Excellent Companions got their original thought or germ out of which the Order was formed will have, perhaps, to be left to conjecture; yet even here I think we may find some data upon which to found a conclusion.

"In setting about the formation of an order suitable for the office of High Priest, what could be more natural or appropriate than to take the scriptural history of the meeting of Abraham with Melchizedek, Priest of the Most High God; the circum-

stances which brought that meeting about; the bringing forth the bread and wine; the blessing, etc.; and the anointing of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood under the Mosaic dispensation. It does seem to me that these would be the most natural sources for anyone to go to for facts and circumstances to work into an order of this kind.

"We can illustrate this point further by reference to a note found in an old ritual of the Mediterranean Pass, as then—and perhaps it may be so now—conferred under the Grand Priory of England and Wales, preparatory to the Order of Malta. That note read as follows:

"In some Priories the candidate partakes of bread from the point of a sword, and wine from a chalice placed upon the blade, handed to him by the Priests."

"Again, on manuscript of the ritual of the Royal Grand Conclave of Scotland, now lying before me, I find similar language used in the ritual of the Templars' Order. How well the thoughts contained in these extracts have been worked into the order of High Priest, every well informed High Priest must very well understand.

"But the question now comes up: Were Webb and his associates in possession of these rituals at the time they originated the order of High Priesthood? I think they were, and for these reasons: In these rituals to which I have referred I find these expressions used: That I will not shed the blood of a K. T. unlawfully; the skull to be laid open, and all the brains to be exposed to the scorching rays of the sun; with several other familiar expressions, which every Royal Arch Mason will readily recognize as appropriately wrought into Webb's Royal Arch degree.

"From the foregoing facts, as well as others not stated, I infer that Thomas Smith Webb, with his coadvisers, Benjamin Hurd, Jr., and James Harrison, were the true authors of the Order; that it dates from the 10th day of January, 1799, at which time it was adopted by the General Grand Chapter, and became a part of the constitutional regulations and requirements of Royal Arch Masonry so far as the authority of the General Grand Chapter extended, and that it continued as such until the 19th day of September, 1853, when it was repealed as before stated."

The foregoing treatise on the subject of the priesthood of Free Masonry is quoted from the Encyclope-

dia of Free-Masonry by Mackey, with addendum by McClenachan, authority which no Mason will question.

It is obvious that the Masonic order of priesthood is man-made, and of comparatively recent introduction into the ritual of the order.