

Some Observations on Ritual Development,
particularly as reflected in the Explanation of the First Tracing Board

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This paper is basically concerned with the development of the ritual Explanation of the First Tracing Board. As with most Australian studies of ritual development, it suffers the defect that the writer has not had access to some original source material that would have permitted deeper study of the subject. Nevertheless, it is felt that, using secondary sources, a picture may be painted which illustrates something of how a particular portion of our ritual has come about.

The paper falls essentially into two parts:

Part I, which reviews briefly the most important sources from which our ritual is derived;

Part II, which examines selected parts of the ritual Explanation of the First Tracing Board and points to probable sources from which they have been compiled.

Much of the source material used has been taken from standard works, including:

Knoop, Jones and Hamer: *The Early Masonic Catechisms*

Jackson: *English Masonic Exposures, 1760-1769*

Dyer: *William Preston and His Work*

Browne: *The Master Key through all the Degrees* (1798)

as well as a number of articles published in the transactions of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge, No .2076, *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*. These have been appropriately specified in the References and Notes.

Part I

The material from which our knowledge of ritual development is derived dates from the 14th century. Some of the early sources have only marginal interest but there is considerable interest in those dating from the beginning of the 1700s. There is difference of opinion regarding

the relevance of some of the latter, more especially where they have a Scottish origin, but the broad outlines of ritual development are reasonably clear.

The earliest of these documents, known collectively as the Old Charges or the Manuscript or Gothic Constitutions, and totalling of the order of 130 in number, are clearly operative in context. They include charges for masters, fellows and apprentices based on well-established customs of the master mason trade as well as items of a moral character prescribing a code of self-discipline. As regards understanding of ritual development, their value is somewhat limited due to the differing fundamentals of the operative and the speculative Crafts, although there is evidence of incorporation of some elements of operative practice and language into the speculative.

Speculative documents appear from 1696 and from then until 1730 or a little later there is a series of aides-memoire usually comprising questions and answers dealing not so much with ceremonial but rather with particular subjects involved in the discussion of masonic principles at the table lodge that was central to the conduct of masonic lodges at the time. The year 1727 saw the beginning of the publication of masonic exposures. The first of these, known as the Wilkinson MS., was published in that year, but more important was one published by Samuel Prichard three years later, in 1730. Going under the title *Masonry Dissected*, it was to prove a most important factor in the development of the Craft for thirty years, for, being used as an aide memoire by many lodges, it tended to stabilise the ritual. Between 1760 and 1769, further exposures were published. This was a time when there were two rival Grand Lodges, colloquially known as the 'Antients' and the 'Moderns', operating in England and the exposures demonstrated some of the ceremonial differences between them. Of these, two were most successful, a number of editions of each being published. One, called *Three Distinct Knocks*, published in 1760, purported to give details of the ceremonies used by the Antients, while the other, named *Jachin and Boaz*, claimed to cater for both the Moderns and the Antients. Both were used as rituals until the end of the century.

The late eighteenth century saw significant change in both the content and the form of speculative Freemasonry. There was a considerable injection of symbolism into the ritual and a greater emphasis on moral teachings. This was reflected in Masonic publications appearing between 1770 and 1813. Of their authors, the best known is probably William Preston. Preston's reputation rests mainly on his work, *Illustrations of Masonry*, first published in 1772, but his basic lecture system, promulgated in 1772 and 1774, was perhaps more important. His lecture system was more than a mere rehearsal of the ceremonies. It was embellished with symbolical, philosophical and moral discourses, a vast improvement upon anything of the nature that had preceded him. Two other authors of the period whose contributions were significant were John Browne and William Finch, who also produced lectures, though not pursuing the symbolic aspects of freemasonry to the same extent as Preston.

The next stage in the development of the ritual comes with the formation of the United Grand Lodge of England in 1813, bringing together the Antients and the Moderns Grand Lodges in the one body. The founders of the United Grand Lodge established a Lodge of Reconciliation with the brief, inter alia, of preparing a ritual which generally members of both former Grand Lodges could accept. The Lodge completed its work in 1814, although its proposed ritual was not 'approved and confirmed by the United Grand Lodge until June 1816. The ritual agreed upon was one which was to influence those adopted by most jurisdictions formed in the English tradition in the post-union years. These included the United Grand Lodge of New South Wales, established by colonial Freemasons in 1888, and, with minor changes, has been the basis for the ceremonies in the jurisdiction since.

There is difficulty in determining the exact form of the ritual approved by the United Grand Lodge of England and even more difficulty in establishing the sources from which the framers of the ritual drew their material. This is due to a number of factors. Perhaps the most obvious and significant of these arose from the procedures adopted by the Lodge of Reconciliation itself. Early in its career, it decided that, in conformity with the accepted principle that no written record should be made of certain Masonic words or letters, no record or note of the

new ritual should be made. In consequence, no official record has been found of the ritual agreed upon, although comparison of various records dating about this time shows a similarity of form and words to provide a general picture. But there is no unanimity on the precise words to be used. The Emulation Lodge of Improvement historian, Dyer¹, says that it is known that some alternative wording was permissible in particular areas, especially as regard some of the smaller and linking procedures. A second factor was the manner in which the new ritual was promulgated to private lodges. Members of the Lodge of Reconciliation visited lodges to demonstrate the new workings. However, as the Masonic encyclopaedist, Bernard Jones, has pointed out², it was quite inevitable that, in the absence of a printed ritual, each would have a slightly different idea of the working and of the words to be used. Moreover, in the view of Jones, if one thing above all others is clear, it is that the Lodge of Reconciliation agreed on certain essentials, its compelling motive being nothing more than the necessity of adjusting differences between the Moderns and the Antients, but it did not lay down cast-iron ritual, word by word. There is, in fact, reason to believe that much 'give and take' went on unofficially, and that the ceremonies, while retaining every essential, deviated considerably in detail, including in wording, during the next ten years. Evidently the United Grand Lodge of England adopted a fairly relaxed attitude towards precision in ritual as Dyer quotes the Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge as stating as late as 1819 that 'so long as the Master of any lodge observed exactly the Landmarks of the Craft, he was at liberty to give lectures in the language best suited to the character of the lodge over which he presided'³.

Concerning the sources used by the Lodge of Reconciliation for material in the preparation of the new ritual, there has been much debate. There are some sources which are obvious and it is known that the Lodge prepared its own version of some parts of the ritual. It is clear, too, that the authors of some sources used had themselves drawn on earlier sources. In consequence, the ritual compiled by the Lodge of Reconciliation reflected available material from a century or

¹ Dyer, Colin F W: *Emulation: A Ritual to Remember*. London. 1973. p23.

² Jones, B E: *Freemasons' Guide and Companion*. London. 1956. pp224, 226.

³ Dyer, C F W: *op.cit.* pp24-25.

more. Thus, any attempt to assess the sources used by the Lodge as a basis for its ritual necessitates consideration not only of the writings of the immediately preceding period but of much earlier writings.

The basic purpose of this paper is to discuss something of the sources of the ritual Explanation of the First Tracing Board and the preceding review of source material has been intended to provide a general background for reference in the discussion. It is to the basic purpose that comment will now be directed.

Part II

There are, however, several preliminary points to be made. Firstly, Freemasonry as practised by the Moderns had a Christian basis, whereas as practised by the Antients it did not. Therefore, when any ritual formulation was borrowed from a Moderns source for inclusion in the ritual under preparation by the Lodge of Reconciliation for approval by the United Grand Lodge, any Christian reference it contained needed to be modified to make it acceptable to the former members of the Antients Grand Lodge. Secondly, there have been changes in detail in the ritual as used in England since it was originally approved by the United Grand Lodge in 1816 and these have not necessarily been adopted by other jurisdictions. Similarly, in other jurisdictions working rituals originally derived from the 1816 English version there have been local amendments made, so that there is additional reason for departure from the English original. Changes of this kind are known to have occurred in the First Degree New South Wales ritual in the north-east charge to the initiate to accommodate the admission of men of non-British origin into the Craft in the years following the Second World War. Changes have been made, too, in the Obligations in each of the Degrees. However, no such changes have been made in the Explanation of the First Tracing Board. Thirdly, in what follows no attempt will be made to discuss the full content of the Explanation. Rather, as previously intimated, particular aspects will be selected to demonstrate something of the origins of ritual changes that occurred over the years before the current version of the Explanation came to be adopted.

At this point I return to the matter of the availability of source material to which reference was made in the opening to this paper. I have been forced to proceed without the advantage of access to the works of two authors whose contributions to ritual development are of considerable interest, namely John Browne and William Finch, both of whom were writing circa 1800. I have had access to a copy of a deciphered version of Browne's 1798 work, *The Master Key through all the Degrees*, but this has limited value in the present context in that it gives the questions of his ritual but not the answers and it is the 1802 version of the same work which is the more important, and this, like Finch's work, is not available. It has been found necessary, therefore, to rely on references to elements of the works of both authors quoted by modern writers, usually in articles in the *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*.

I turn now to a discussion of selected parts of the Explanation of the First Tracing Board as included in the printed ritual issued by the United Grand Lodge of New South Wales.

The usages and customs (Ritual, p50)

The opening sentences of the Explanation draw attention to the similarity between the method used by Freemasonry to advance the education of its members in the practice of its rites and the methods used by the ancient Egyptians, Pythagoras and various other orders to inculcate their teachings. With slight adaptation, principally to convert the wording from a catechetical form to the narrative, they are essentially a reproduction of section [??] of the first lecture on Freemasonry by William Preston.

Preston's work, particularly his thoughts on and arrangement of the Masonic ritual, procedure and symbolism represent, according to Dyer, [the greatest] major contribution by any one man to the practice of Freemasonry. Dyer sums up his view of Preston's contribution: 'He took the very rough and ready forms which had developed by the 1760s and by the sheer influence of what he taught and wrote, forced

the words and practices used by the early 1800s to be something of much higher quality⁴.

A difficulty in studying Preston's contribution is that there is no standard version of his lectures. Relatively few copies of the lectures still exist. There are fewer still of those which provide answers to the questions, and those which provide both the printed questions and the manuscript answers are difficult to read. Further, Preston and those working with his lectures were frequently making alterations and amendments to the contents. In what follows, therefore, the texts quoted and the comments made are based on the texts contained in the detailed study made by P.R. James and published in *A.Q.C.*⁵

The questions and answers concerning the usages and customs of the ancient Egyptians, Pythagoras and others run:

What information was then conveyed?

Three essential points:

First point

That the usages and customs amongst Masons were nearly connected with those of the ancient Egyptians who, unwilling to expose their mysteries to vulgar eyes, concealed the principles of polity and philosophy under hieroglyphical figures and expressed their notions of government by signs and symbols, which were only communicated to the magi or priests and they were bound by oath never to reveal them.

Second point

That Pythagoras had established his system on the same plan, and many other Orders of more recent date had copied his example.

Third point

That Masonry was not only the most ancient but the best moral plan which has been ever devised by human wisdom. Every mark, character and emblem portrayed in the Lodge

⁴ Dyer, C F W: *William Preston and His Work*. London. 1987. p3.

⁵ James, P R: 'William Preston's "First Lecture of Freemasonry"; *AQC*, Vol 82, p104. The version contained in James's article is a composite work, drawing on all extant material.

had a moral tendency and serves to inculcate the practice of virtue in every spectator⁶.

The debt owed by the framers of this part of the modern ritual to Preston is quite apparent. There is nothing in the earlier ritual sources which remotely resembles Preston's text and it can be stated positively, therefore, that this section of the ritual Explanation of the First Tracing Board owes its origin to Preston's work.

The form of the Lodge (Ritual, p50-51)

The description of the form of the lodge given in the Explanation is brief. It makes four points:

firstly, its shape is that of a double cube;
secondly, in its orientation its length is from East to West, its breadth between North and South;
thirdly, in depth it is from the surface of the earth to the centre, and in height as high even as the heavens;
fourthly, so described, it carries with it a symbolism describing the universality of the science and the breadth of a Mason's charity.

Brief though the description may be, it has a long and well-accepted history in the ritual sources of the Craft ceremonial.

There is reference to the orientation of the lodge harking back more than three centuries in some of the very early Masonic catechisms. For example, the Edinburgh Register House MS. of 1696 includes the question and answer:

Q. How stands your Lodge? An. East and West as
the temple of Jerusalem⁷.

This is not as specific as in the modern Explanation, nor, indeed, are others of the later catechisms. It is not until 1760 that questions and answers are to be found in the exposures of the day which provide

⁶ *ibid*, p131.

⁷ Knoop, D; Jones, GP; Hamer, D: *The Early Masonic Catechisms*. Manchester. 1963. p32.

detail equivalent to that in the present ritual, namely, in the exposure, *Three Distinct Knocks*. In that document there is a series of questions and answers which, as regards lodge orientation, runs:

Q. How long Brother?

A. From East to West.

Q. How wide Brother?

A. Between North and South⁸.

This is, of course, exactly the description which appears in the modern Explanation. When Preston developed his ritual for the First Degree, he, in fairly typical fashion, attempted to expand the 1760 description somewhat. He gave as his version of the questions and answers:

What is its length?

Though seemingly limited it is boundless, for it extends from east to west.

What is its breadth?

It fills the whole space between north and south⁹.

However, when the Lodge of Reconciliation came to prepare its version of the Explanation of the First Tracing Board it did not follow Preston. Rather, as regards orientation, it adopted the simpler description that had been in use since 1760.

The early masonic catechisms also make reference to the height of the lodge. The Sloane MS 3329 of circa 1700 includes amongst the questions and answers:

Q how high is your lodge A. without fouts yards or Inches it reaches to heaven¹⁰.

Then the Trinity College, Dublin, MS. of 1711 has:

Q. How high is yr lodge? A. As high as ye stars inches and feet innumerable¹¹.

The Wilkinson MS .of circa 1727 describes the height of the lodge as 'Inches, Feet and Yards innumerable' and Prichard's *Masonry Dissected*,

⁸ Jackson, ACF: *English Masonic Exposures*, 1760-1769. London. 1986. p79.

⁹ James, PR: *op. cit.*. p48.

¹⁰ Knoop D, *et al. op. cit.*. p48.

¹¹ *ibid.* p70.

of three years later, has it that the lodge is 'Inches, Feet and Yards innumerable, as high as the Heavens'¹². It is not until 1760 that catechetical references are to be found to the depth of the lodge in the exposures. The relevant questions and answers in *Three Distinct Knocks* are:

Mas. How high Brother?

Ans. From the Earth to the Heavens.

Mas. How deep Brother?

Ans. From the Surface of the Earth to the Centre¹³.

a series repeated in another exposure of similar date, *Jachin and Boaz*, and, for practical purposes, in Preston's lectures . It seems that, directly or indirectly, the Lodge of Reconciliation accepted for incorporation in its proposed ritual the formulation to be found in the 1760 exposures.

The New South Wales ritual describes the form of the lodge as a 'double cube'. In most workings, however, 'oblong square' is the term used to describe the lodge, although there are other alternatives such as 'long square', 'parallelogram' and 'parallelepipedon'. The last-mentioned of these has been adopted in the English Perfect Ceremonies working, apparently following Emulation, and its use has been astringently criticised as having been introduced by 'some would-be clever ignoramus'¹⁴. The term 'oblong square' is to be found in the 1717 Wilkinson MS but 'long square' is used in Prichard's *Masonry Dissected*. The reason given for this in the Wilkinson MS is that the form of the lodge is in 'the Manner of our Grand Master Hiram's grave' but this is an explanation that does not recur in other ritual sources. However, the description, 'oblong square' reappears in the 1760 exposures, *Three Distinct Knocks* and *Jachin and Boaz*¹⁵. According to James, Preston's lectures give the alternative descriptions of parallelogram or long or oblong square¹⁶. The Lodge of Reconciliation version appears to have been 'oblong square', but the possibility cannot be ruled out that the recollections of member have been different, and so the various alternatives may all have achieved

¹² *ibid.* p130.

¹³ Jackson, ACF: *op.cit.* p80.

¹⁴ Cartwright, EH: *A Commentary on the Freemasonic Ritual*. Tunbridge Wells. 1973. p165.

¹⁵ Jackson, ACF: *op.cit.* pp79, 145.

¹⁶ James, PR: *op.cit.* p132.

a currency. I have been unable to ascertain how the term 'double cube' came into the New South Wales ritual.

Little symbolism is attached to the material to be derived from the early ritual sources such as the masonic catechism. However, from 1760 onwards there is an increasing symbolic content. *Three Distinct Knocks* and *Jachin and Boaz* both record a follow-on from the question concerning the depth of the lodge which refers to the universality of the Craft. The section of the catechism runs:

Mas. Why is your Lodge said to be from the Surface to the Centre of the Earth?

Ans. Because that Masonry is universal¹⁷.

In this context the Craft's universality is related only to the depth of the lodge but the modern ritual relates its universality to the general form of the lodge. Preston, however, widens the symbolism. After a series of questions and answers concerning the form, length, breadth and height of the lodge, he concludes:

What do these morally exemplify?

The universality of the system and the extended influence of its laws, uniting men of every country and opinion in the same plan: the glory of God and the good of their kind.

Thus we exemplify that universal school which extends its general influence to every nation in the world.

The modern ritual follows Preston in generalising the symbolic reference, but it does not adopt the moral explanation which he provides. Rather, it accepts the universality symbolism but introduces a further symbolic explanation based on the extent of a Mason's charity. Presumably this was a contribution of the Lodge of Reconciliation.

Holy Ground (Ritual, p51)

The Explanation says that our lodges stand on holy ground because the first lodge was consecrated on account of three grand offerings made thereon which met with divine approbation. These offerings (which

¹⁷ Jackson, ACF: *op.cit.* pp80, 145.

are detailed), it says, were made by Abraham, King David and King Solomon.

This element of the Explanation with its symbolic aspects is of comparatively recent origin. There is nothing like it in the documents prior to 1770, although its beginnings may be seen in the Wilkinson MS. and in Prichard's *Masonry Dissected*. The catechism of the former has this question and answer:

Q. Where does it (the Lodge) stand.

A. Upon Holy Ground in the Vale of Iesophat or elsewhere.¹⁸

and the latter has a similar, but more extended version

Q. Where does the Lodge stand?

A. Upon holy Ground, or the highest Hill or lowest Vales or in the Vale of Jehosaphat, or any other secret Place¹⁹.

There is nothing similar in the Entered Apprentice catechisms of the 1760 exposures, but the distinguished Masonic scholar, the late Harry Carr, in discussing this topic, points out that in *Jachin and Boaz*, in the catechism following the Raising Ceremony, called the Master's Lecture, there appears:

Q. Why was both your Shoes taken from off your Feet?

A. Because the Place I stood on when I was made a Mason was Holy Ground

and in *The Three Distinct Knocks* the answer given is expanded with the explanation:

for the Lord said unto Moses, pull off thy Shoes, for the Place whereon thou standest is holy Ground²⁰.

Carr goes on to say that it seems probable that the wider symbolism given in the modern Explanation of the First Tracing Board is the work of the later interpreters of the ritual, Preston, Browne, etc, in the last decade of the 18th century.

¹⁸ Knoop, D *et al. op.cit.* p130.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p162.

²⁰ Carr, H: *The Freemason at Work*. London. 1976. pp228-9.

As Carr has pointed out, Preston has two relevant references to the fact that, to a mason, the ground on which his lodge stands is holy. In his 'First Lecture on Free Masonry', Section II, Clause I, this explanation is given:

Why s(lipshod)?

Because the ground we are about to tread is holy.

What rendered that ground holy?

The Name of God impressed on it, Who has declared – where my Name is there I am – and therefore it must be holy.

To what does this allude?

To a custom observed in the east of throwing off the sandals from the feet when they enter the Holy Temple.

To what does it further allude?

To a circumstance mentioned in Holy Writing, that when the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush a voice was heard to utter this word: Slip thy shoes from off thy feet for the ground upon which you tread is holy. What God commands must be obeyed²¹.

Later, in Section IV, Clause III of his Lecture, Preston goes further, introducing the three grand offerings and explaining their significance.

On what ground is the Masonic mansion raised?

On holy ground.

Why?

For two reasons:

First reason Because the Name of God must be thereon impressed.

Second reason Because the ground on which the first regular Lodge under the royal sanction was formed was peculiarly sacred.

What rendered that ground holy?

Three grand offerings were on that spot presented which met with divine approbation.

First offering The act of Abraham.

²¹ James, PR: *op.cit.* pp121-2.

Second offering The act of King David.

Third offering The act of King Solomon.

What do these offerings exemplify?

Three singular instances of divine mercy and of unparalleled Virtue:

First instance In the first offering we have a remarkable proof of filial obedience and unfeigned piety in viewing a tender father urged by the purest principles offering on that spot a victim, an only son, the dearest pledge of his love, when in the awful moment of sacrifice we view his hand stalled and the Lord pleased to accept the will for the deed, and to substitute another victim more acceptable in his stead.

Second instance In the second offering we have a singular instance of conscious remorse and sincere contrition, by viewing a great monarch prostrating himself on the same spot before his God; acknowledging in painful accents his error and pouring forth from his guilty heart effusions of piety by prayer and supplication to assuage the divine wrath and to allay the pestilence which then reigned amongst his people, the direful effects of his having dared, in disobedience to the will of Heaven, to number them.

Third instance In the third offering we have as conspicuous a proof of sincere gratitude by viewing a wise and renowned sovereign humbly acknowledging on the same spot the goodness and bounty of his Creator by enabling him to plan, carry on and complete, for the worship of his God, that stupendous structure, the Temple of Jerusalem, and accepting from him praise and thanksgiving, the simple tribute of gratitude²².

This is, of course, a far more detailed explanation than appears in today's ritual, this part of which apparently owes much of its origin to Browne. Unlike Preston, Browne does not attempt to explain why the ground on which the (supposed) first lodge was consecrated, but it has been suggested by Carr that, setting aside the somewhat extreme justifications advanced by Preston, an appropriate interpretation might be that:

²² *Ibid.* p133.

Abraham's complete and unflinching faith in the Almighty,
David's whole-hearted dependence on Prayer,
Solomon's immeasurable gratitude to God upon completion of
the great work of his life, i.e., the Temple,
all three were expressions of faith, all different for different reasons,
and all utterly complete without reservation. With this interpretation, it
might be argued that the ground on which a lodge is founded is a
belief in a G.A.O.T.U.²³

Situation of Lodges (Ritual pp51-53)

The rather lengthy reference in the Explanation of the First Tracing Board to the situation of lodges is interesting, primarily because it illustrates the development of the ritual but also because it demonstrates the change in Freemasonry from an institution with a Christian basis to one with a more deistic foundation. This latter matter will be the subject of comment in connection with the Two Grand Parallel Lines, to which reference will next be made, but it is convenient now to trace the references associated with the ritual changes from the very early Masonic catechisms to the post-union changes.

The first reference noted in the catechisms occurs in the Edinburgh Register MS, a Scottish catechism of 1696. It has the question and answer:

Q. How stands your lodge. An. East and West, as the temple of Jerusalem²⁴.

This same formulation is repeated in several subsequent catechisms. A somewhat wider response to the question is to be found in the Sloane MS 3329 of c.1700, also apparently of Scottish origin, which provides a Christian context:

(Q) where did they first call their Lodge (A) at the holy Chapell of St.John

(Q) how Stands your Lodge (A) as the said holy Chapell and all other holy Temples Stand (Viz) east and west.²⁵

²³ Carr, Harry, *op.cit.* p230.

²⁴ Knoop, D, *et al.*: *op.cit.* p32.

²⁵ *ibid.* p48.

The Dumfries No. 4 MS of c.1710, obviously Scottish, incorporates the two responses in one when it says:

East & west because all holy churches & temples stand yt way and particularlie yt temple of Jerusalem²⁶

and there are variations in the response subsequently, including Prichard's *Masonry Dissected*.

The exposures, *Three Distinct Knocks* and *Jachin and Boaz* of 1760 and 1762, repeat the response in the Sloane MS 3329.

As with many other elements of the Explanation of the First Tracing Board, the responses to the relevant questions concerning the East-West orientation of the lodge take a new turn from about the beginning of the 1770s. A symbolic explanation appears for the first time, and again the influence of Preston is important. Preston's First Degree Lecture includes:

What is the proper situation of the Masonic building?

Due east and west.

Why is it so situated?

Because all places for the adoration of God are to be so situated.

Why are places of adoration so situated?

Three reasons are assigned:

First reason. Because the sun, the glory of the Lord, first rises in the east and then gradually directs its course to the west.

Second reason. To remind us that learning originated in the east and then spread its influence to the west for the benefit of mankind.

Third reason. Because that Tabernacle which Moses erected in the wilderness as a repository for the Ark, the symbol of the Divine Providence and the judicial, ceremonial and moral Law for the conduct of the Jews, was by especial command, situated due east and west in conformity to a plan said to

²⁶ *ibid.* p62.

have been received by Moses from the Lord on the Mount. From the situation of this rude fabric in early ages of the world King Solomon adopted it as the ground plan of his more magnificent structure, the Temple of Jerusalem, a pattern of symmetry and proportion began, carried on and completed under the auspices of a sovereign whose regal splendour and unparalleled lustre have almost surpassed idea. In the situation of the building, therefore, we copy his example.²⁷

There are both similarities and differences between the Preston version of the reasons for the lodge orientation and the reasons given in the modern ritual Explanation. The first two reasons given, namely, that the orientation reflects the facts that the Sun, the Glory of the Lord, rises in the East and sets in the West, and that learning originated in the East and then spread to the West are described in almost the same wording in both versions. The Explanation, however, gives a much more detailed account of the third reason, although there are parts which have obviously been influenced by Preston. For instance, it includes an admonition that we, as Masons, should always contemplate the beautiful works of creation and be ever ready to adore the Almighty Creator, and points out that there is no place for the solemnisation acknowledged in the Bible until after the story of the deliverance of the Children of Israel from their Egyptian bondage when, in accordance with the Lord's plan, a tent or tabernacle, situated East and West, was erected for that purpose. No such account appears in Preston. However, in most other respects there are parallels.

On the information available – and I have already said that I have no copy of the works of Finch and Browne beyond the latter's 1798 version – it is not possible to determine whether the expansion of this part of the Explanation was due to Browne or was an addition made by the Lodge of Reconciliation, or even by some later authority.

Faith, Hope and Charity (Ritual, p55)

Two Grand Parallel Lines (Ritual, p59)

²⁷ James, PR: *op.cit.* pp134.

The last two items on which I propose to comment are the Christian virtues, Faith, Hope and Charity, associated in the Explanation with the staves of Jacob's ladder, and the two grand parallel lines, said to border the circle round which a Mason cannot err. I deal with them together as their history is related to the change in emphasis in Freemasonry from Christianity to deism.

As we have just seen in connection with the orientation of the lodge, there is a strong Christian element in much of the early Masonic literature. But as we approach the Union, we find two conflicting tendencies at work; an attempt on the one hand to return to the non-sectarianism expressed in the First Charge of Anderson's *Book of Constitutions* (1723), and, on the other, a desire to maintain or even to augment the Christianising tendency that is apparent in later catechisms and exposures²⁸. The non-sectarian tendency we find prominently displayed in Preston's works. When Preston wishes to refer to the Deity, he almost invariably carefully uses a neutral description, such as T.G.A.O.U. The Browne and Finch workings, on the other hand, even as late as the beginning of the nineteenth century, cling somewhat to the sectarian tendency. Thus Finch provides as a reason for the situation of Masonic lodges due East and West that this is 'in commemoration of the establishment and propagation of the holy gospel from East to West'. In his explanation of the Three Theological Virtues, he says that the first of them, Faith, is given as a 'true Christian faith', which will bring us finally to eternal happiness with God 'whose Son died for us and rose again that we might be justified through faith, in his most precious blood.' Browne does not go as far as Finch in his Christianising tendency, but he describes the Theological Virtues as 'Faith in Christ, Hope in Salvation and Charity to live with all mankind'²⁹.

Neither the Theological Virtues nor the Two Grand Parallel Lines appear to find a place in the early catechisms and exposures. However, Preston has reference to both. As in the modern Explanation, he relates the Virtues to the staves of a ladder (Not, it may be

²⁸ Clarke, JR: 'The Change from Christianity to Deism in Freemasonry'. *AQC*. Vol. LXXVIII (1965). p63. This point was made by Alex Horne in his written comments on Clarke's paper.

²⁹ *ibid.* pp64-64.

noted, to Jacob's Ladder). On this, his catechism most frequently proceeds:

How do we arrive at the summit of the building?

By means of a ladder consisting of many but strengthened by three principal steps.

What is the proper situation of those three principal steps?

At the bottom, middle and top of the ladder.

Name them.

Faith, Hope and Charity.

Explain those virtues.

Faith in One Supreme Omnipotent Being; Hope in the favour and protection of that Being; Charity to all mankind, or universal benevolence.

Where does this ladder reach?

To the heavens.

On what does it rest?

On the Sacred Law.

Why is it so supported?

Because by that Law our faith in the Supreme Being and our belief in the wise dispensation of His Providence are strengthened.

This enables us to overcome the prime difficulty and, fearless of danger, to ascend the first step of the ladder.

How do we then proceed?

Our faith being well grounded, to the second step we proceed, which is carefully guarded by hope.

What impression does this make on us?

We cherish the promised blessings, ascend the second step of the ladder and glory in having surmounted another difficulty.

Where do we next reach?

To the third step of the ladder where Charity kindly hails us welcome.³⁰

This catechism has some features in common with the modern Explanation, but there are, of course, substantial differences. As regards the Two Grand Parallels, in his Lecture he acknowledges the

³⁰ James, PR: *op.cit.* pp135-6.

importance of King Solomon in Masonic legend and follows and old Masonic tradition, of unsubstantiated authority, in ascribing to Freemasonry the patronage of St. John the Baptist and St John the Evangelist:

Ded gen? /Dedication general/

To the memory of Solomon who was King of Israel; who was alike renowned for the depth of his wisdom, the extent of his power, and the superiority of his skill in the art.

Why?

Because he was the first G.M. who reduced the present system into form, and under whose love and protection the mysteries we retain first received sanction. To this eminent character therefore the Fraternity is bound to pay a grateful tribute and due veneration.

Ded part? /dedication particular/

In the later periods of the world other distinguished characters have attracted notice; hence John the Baptist stands forward as our leading Patron. To his memory we pay tribute. In him we have a singular instance of beauty of mind, quality of zeal, simplicity of manner and an ardent wish to benefit mankind by his example. To him we are indebted for the introduction of that grand tenet of our Institution, which it is our glory to support: Peace on Earth, Goodwill to Man.

Why?

The above:

Equal?

To carry into execution this grand tenet and to transmit to future ages so valuable a doctrine an equal has been selected, John the Evangelist, in whom we find talents and learning alike conspicuous; thence to him we pay due allegiance as the Patron of our art.

In what?

He is considered to be equal in this. As the personal influence of John the Baptist could not extend beyond the bounds of a private circle, or so effectively diffuse the benefits of the plan he had introduced, an assistant was necessary to complete the work he had begun. In John the

Evangelist, therefore, we discover the same zeal as (in) John the Baptist and superior abilities displayed to perfect the improvement of man. Copying the example of his predecessor we view him arranging and ably digesting, by his eminent talents, the great doctrine which had been issued into the world, and transmitting by his writings for the benefit of prosperity the influence of that doctrine to which the zeal of his predecessor had given birth. As parallels in Masonry we rank these two Patrons and class them as joint promoters of our system. To their memory, in conjunction with Solomon, we are taught to pay due homage and veneration, while in the ceremony of dedication we commemorate their virtues and transmit them to later ages, we derive from their favour patronage and protection.³¹

In respect of the Saints John, Preston was clearly departing from his general policy of avoiding a Christian connection to the Craft.

As has been previously said, lack of access to the full Finch and Browne works prevents full consideration of the contributions made to the ritual about the end of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries. However, the available copy of the first edition of Browne includes copy of his second edition text of his ritual reference to the symbolism of the point within a circle and the two grand parallels:

In all regular well-formed freemasons' Lodges there is a point within a circle in going round which it is said the Master and Brethren cannot materially err. The circle is bounded on the north and south by two perpendicular parallel lines. That on the right is said to represent Saint John the Baptist, and that on the left Saint John the Evangelist. On the upper points of those two parallels and upon the porphyry (*sic*) of the circle rests the Holy Bible which supports Jacob's Ladder which it is said reached to the watery clouds of Heaven . It also contains the dictates of an Unerring and Omnipotent All-wise Being, so that while we are as conversant therein and obedient thereto as those two Grand Parallels were, it will bring us to Him that will not deceive, nor will He be

³¹ *ibid.* pp142-3.

deceived by, us; and in going round that circle, as we must naturally touch upon those two parallels as well as on that Holy Book, while we as Masons keep ourselves thus surcircumscribed (sic) it is impossible we can materially err.³²

Here his leaning towards a Christian basis for the Craft is made abundantly clear.

When the Union of the two rival English Grand Lodges came about in 1813 and the Lodge of Reconciliation began its work, the Craft adopted a policy of de-Christianisation of the ritual but, at the same time, it made considerable use of the work of John Browne, which was strongly Christian in character. The Lodge was forced to vary some of Browne's wording, although this often could be done only with some difficulty. Thus, where, for example, Browne used an expression such as 'faith in Christ', in the approved version of the Explanation of the First Tracing Board, the expression became 'Faith in T.G.A.O.T.U.', although what are described as the Three Theological Virtues, Faith, Hope and Charity, remained. Similarly, the ritual reference to the two Saints John in relation to the two perpendicular parallel lines became a reference to Moses and King Solomon, although this particular change seems to have been effected independently in 1815, said to have been done in deference to the susceptibility of Jewish brethren.

At this stage I call a halt to these comments. There are, of course, other matters which might be discussed. For example, in the Explanation of the First Board it is said that the furniture of the Lodge consists of the Volume of the Sacred Law, the compasses and the square (Ritual, p57). Yet, during the main part of the ceremony, these same symbols are described as the great emblematical lights, (Ritual, p44). What is the reason for this difference? It is a matter well worthy of discussion. Then there is the reference to the lewis (Ritual, p60). This a symbol of which the origin is obscure. That would repay consideration. So, too, would the four cardinal virtues, namely Fortitude, Prudence, Temperance and Justice (Ritual p60).

³² Browne, J: *The Master Key through all the Degrees*. London. MDCCXCVIII. (typescript of de-coded version.)

However, all this might be the subject of comment on another occasion.

While my focus in this paper has been narrow, essentially the progressive emergence of the Explanation of the First Tracing Board as we know it, my comments should have made it apparent that, during the century or so on which I have been concentrating, there was considerable development of our ritual. Since the early nineteenth century the rate of change has diminished, to a considerable extent due to the fact that, whether our Masonic predecessors liked it or not, the ritual became available in printed form and this encouraged stabilisation. Nevertheless, even in the time of many of us, there have been changes, for instance, in the penalties enunciated in the obligations, though not, I might add in the Board Explanations, and no doubt in some future time some brother like myself will be seeking to explain to his lodge how and why these came about.

(Note: In the references above, *AQC* relates to the Transactions of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge, No. 2076, published annually under the title of *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*.)