

SKETCH OF THE ORDER OF HIGH PRIESTHOOD.

BY S. STACKER WILLIAMS, P.H.P.

Though as a Masonic degree, the Order of High Priesthood cannot claim to be of ancient origin, yet as to the date of its birth, or the name of its originator, we are not absolutely certain. That it is of American origin I believe to be true, and that it was originated by Thomas Smith Webb is highly probable. At all events, the first mention of it, so far as I have been able to learn, is found in his Monitor. It is not mentioned in his first, or 1797 edition of this work, but a chapter is devoted to it in the edition of 1802, under the caption of

"OBSERVATIONS ON THE ORDER OF HIGH PRIEST."

The chapter does not appear in connection with the monitorial matter relating to the caputular degrees; but after that with reference to the Orders of Masonic Knighthood. It opens with this statement: "This Order appertains to the office of High Priest of a Royal Arch Chapter, and no one can be legally entitled to receive it until he has been elected to sustain that office in some regular chapter of Royal Arch Masons." The scripture lessons occur in the following order: Numbers vi. : 22-26. Genesis xiv. : 12-24. Hebrews vii. : 1-6.

I quote the following from a sketch of the Order by the late Alfred F. Chapman, Past General Grand High Priest, and for a number of years Grand Secretary of the Grand Chapter of Massachusetts:

"The Massachusetts Convention of High Priests was established on November 6, 1826, in its present form; and the Order was conferred on eight High Priests before the year closed. The membership roll of this body commences with William McKean, May, 1789, and shows, with few exceptions, annual additions to the list.

"No one was admitted between 1795 and 1799, and but one other in-

terval exceeds two years and that was in 1830-31. Its present membership exceeds four hundred.

"The earliest mention that we have seen of the degree in Pennsylvania is 'December 12, 1825,' under Michael Nisbet, Grand High Priest, when the degree was conferred on six Past High Priests by Past Grand High Priest Newcomb. This was done in Grand Chapter."

The following is from the pen of Companion Edward T. Schultz, Masonic Historian of Maryland:

"The Council of High Priests of Maryland was organized May 7, 1824, and has had a continued existence to the present time. Its records, with the autographic signature of all companions anointed since that date, are preserved and are highly valued by the companions of Maryland."

From Comp. Schultz's sketch it is learned that the Maryland Council conferred the order *as a courtesy* upon a large number of distinguished companions of other jurisdictions, among whom were the late M.E. Companions Albert Pike, of Arkansas, and William B. Thrall, of Ohio.

The late Companion William Hacker having given much time to an investigation of the Order, and having left a record of the results of his labors, I avail myself of the following extract therefrom, although he did not appear to be in possession of the information furnished by Comps. Chapman and Schultz *in re* Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Maryland: "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 com-