

the American rite. The *ritual* of a degree denotes the form and manner of initiation into that degree. The word *ritual* cannot be applied to any manual or book containing the order and forms of initiation, because by obligatory or statutory enactment, it is impossible that any such manual can exist in Masonry.

Let us be a little more precise in our definition of this word. The ritual as a degree does not consist of the modes of recognition only; it does not consist of the lectures only; it does not consist of the ceremonies only. The ritual comprises all of these. It is like a book of which the ceremonies are the text, the lectures the commentary, and the modes of recognition the appendix. The omission of any one part would mutilate the volume and render it incomplete.

The ritual thus constituted is not as some have supposed, the mere external covering of Masonry, like the skin and muscles which enclose the skeleton and give to the body a rounded shape. On the contrary, it is the whole body of Masonry, the integuments, the flesh, the bones, which give it form, and the nerves and veins and arteries which give it life. Eliminate from a Masonic degree its ritual, and you leave behind—nothing. A lodge without its ritual is, as far as any Masonic character is concerned, a mere nonentity. It is in fact no better than a beef-steak club, or a mendicity society. It might be social—it might be benevolent, for the time that it would last, which would not be long; but its science and its philosophy would have disappeared forever and its Masonic relationship would no longer be recognized.

Seeing then, the importance of the ritual as thus comprehensively defined, it cannot be doubted that a history of its primitive condition and of the changes that it has undergone, since its first invention, would be one of the most valuable and interesting documents that could be submitted to the Masonic student. How many questions of almost impossible solution in our present state of knowledge, would such a history at once resolve. There would be no difficulty in silencing satisfactorily the controversy now being mooted among Masonic archæologists, whether there was or was not more than one degree at the beginning of the eighteenth century, if we had the *esoteric* history of the ritual in 1717, when Anderson and Desaguliers prepared their system of initiation.

How much more interesting would our symbols and ceremonies become, if we were able always to designate with certainty the time when—the person by whom—and the manner in which—they were first introduced into the ritual. In fact, the history of the ritual, if it were written, would throw a flood of light upon the history of Masonry, as an organization, in points which are now enveloped in the deepest darkness. If, for instance, we know from our German antiquaries that a certain ceremony was in use among the Operative Stone-masons of the middle ages, and if we could find the same ceremony existing three or four centuries later, at the time of the establishment of the Grand Lodge in London, then a positive link would be established in what is now only a problematical chain of connection between the two organizations. And so, too, we might, by the history of symbols and ceremonies, confirm or disprove the asserted relationship of Freemasonry to the Rosecrucians, to the Gnostics, to the Roman Colleges of Artificers, or to any other secret organizations of ancient or mediæval times. We can hardly begin to estimate, at its true value, the importance of the connection between the history of Freemasonry and the history of the ritual.

But, unfortunately, such a history, complete, thorough, and authentic, can never be written only with the utmost difficulty. The obligatory law to which I have already alluded, which prohibits the publication of Masonic rituals, leaves us without those authorized documents on which such a history should be founded. Everything ritualistic is, or ought to be, oral and traditional. Whatever changes may, from time to time, have been made, have been handed down as the Indians transmit their legends, from man to man, and from generation to generation. To memory alone has been confided these records which are necessary to the composition of such a history. But memory is treacherous, and that which is orally transmitted is constantly liable to additions, and to perversions in the transmission. Wisely has Bishop Hall said that "as for oral traditions, what certainty can there be in them? What foundation of truth can be laid upon the breath of man?"

But, although, if we should search for the elements of information on which to construct a history of the ritual since the beginning of the last century, we would find the field barren, with the promise of a plentiful harvest hopeless, yet it is not altogether fruitless. For if we cannot construct a narrative which, in continuous and uninterrupted form, will detail the condition of the ritual when the Grand Lodge of England, the modern Grand Lodge of the world, was organized, or revived in 1717, at the Apple Tree Tavern, and all the changes that it has since undergone, yet we have abundant materials which supply us with comparisons, analogies, critical deductions, and probable suggestions, out of which, and by means of which, we may frame a theory as to many of the most prominent points of the ritual, and thus arrive at a proximate