



Provincial Grand Chapter of Warwickshire

The Left Hand

Q. What can you tell us about the questions and answers at the after proceedings and in particular the custom of holding the glass in the left hand whilst drinking the 'toast'?

A. In the after-proceedings of many Chapters in our Constitution questions relating to the Original Grand Lodges are put to the Principal Sojourner by the First Principal. After the exchange the Companions are invited to drink to 'the pious memory of those Grand Originals.'

Most Companions with whom I have spoken assume that the 'Grand Originals' referred to are the nine biblical characters who are said to have presided over the three Grand Lodges; but there are rituals in use which imply that the reference should be to the Original Grand Lodges, not those who presided.

A manuscript used between about 1780-85 refers to the Holy, the Sacred and the Grand and Royal Lodges and the nine names we use today; the wording is different but the sense is much the same; there is however no call to drink 'to the pious memory'. In the first Royal Arch rituals to be printed (they started in 1846) there was no reference to the exchange between the First Principal and the Principal Sojourner. However the questions and answers, with some slight variations in wording, ARE printed in an 1877 edition.

By 1884 other ritual books had been published and these contained the questions and answers, as well as the 'toast' to 'the pious memory of those Grand Originals', but the 'toast' was not included in the Perfect Ceremony ritual book until 1926.

As might be expected even today there are variations of procedure throughout the country; some ritual books still make no mention of drinking to the pious memory or otherwise; in others, for example in a ritual printed in 1893, the 'toast' is taken separately for each Lodge after the Principal Sojourner has given the names of those who presided. In another ritual where the toasts are taken separately the relevant wording is; after the Holy Lodge; 'to the pious memory of those three Grand Originals'; after the sacred Lodge; 'to the sacred memory of those three Grand Master's, and after the Grand and Royal Lodge; 'to the Royal memory of those Grand Principals.'

Another interesting difference is found in a ritual book which, after the reference to the Grand and Royal Lodge, prints three more questions and answers dealing with the Royal Arch. There is no reference at all to drinking. A rubric in this ritual says that the questions may be put to the several Companions, seated in the Chapter.

This table procedure is said to be the remaining vestige of the catechetical method of ritual instruction used in both the Craft and the Royal Arch, but which had long ago been replaced by the narrative form. From the information given, though, this table catechism would seem to date from about 1877.

It has not been possible to establish when the idea was first mooted of holding the glass in the left hand whilst drinking this particular 'toast'. It is not universal practice; nor are there sound reasons for its use. There are many who find unsatisfactory the reasons usually given, namely because the heart is on the left side of the body or because it is in the Royal Arch that the only sign given with the left hand is used. It is a harmless enough custom, but those advocating it should not be dogmatic about its use. Companions, whenever we drink to 'the pious memory of those Grand Originals', irrespective of the hand in which we hold the glass, let us recall the spiritual lessons that are to be found in this Supreme Order..

E. Comp. Harry Mendoza