

FIRST VERSION, written specifically
for Richard de Vernon Preceptors No 52
at Dudley which had many members
from Lodge Glittering Star.
Since revised for general delivery

THE UNITED ORDERS OF THE TEMPLE AND MALTA

Imagine ... imagine - close your eyes if it will help, but don't fall asleep - imagine yourselves on a flight through time and space. In time to the eighteenth century - let us say about the middle of it - and in space perhaps to somewhere in Germany.

There was under a full head of steam at the time an Order on the Continent known as the Rite of Strict Observance, one of several which had been built on to the foundation of early Craft Freemasonry. The 'Strict Observance' of the title referred to the unquestioning obedience to unknown superiors which was imposed upon its members. Despite this rather fearsome condition, the Order prospered to such an extent that, in its heyday, it enjoyed greater support than did the relatively simple English-style three-degree system which was working in Germany and elsewhere.

The particular feature of the Strict Observance which is of interest to the present assembly was that it embraced a supposition that secrets of the medieval Knights Templar, who had been suppressed in 1312, had survived within the rite and were available to its members. We need not now pursue, if indeed we could, the form in which the Templar element was taught and conferred. Suffice it to say that it was there and that it was capable of communication to those concerned.

We now turn to another, but no less important, aspect of our story. From 1732 onwards - and with increasing prominence - it had been the practice of the three Grand Lodges of Great Britain and Ireland to issue warrants for lodges which could be held within regiments of the British army, wherever those regiments happened to be serving, at home or abroad. Such lodges met, for instance, on the Continent and there was often an interplay between them and the forms of Freemasonry which

were locally in vogue. Again, we must not dwell upon detail but we can seize upon a strong supposition that some of the travelling military lodges, through intervisitation at the level of the Craft degrees, became aware of and acquired certain of the 'additional' degrees which were being presented.

Before long, some of these were being regularly worked within the military lodges as steps for advancement beyond the Master Mason's degree, and were thus transported back to Britain, to the Americas, to India and elsewhere and in due time were adopted by stationary lodges. Although we must not be diverted from the principal thread of our narrative, it ought to be mentioned that the Royal Arch, the Rose Croix and certain other degrees were in this way imported from the Continent and thenceforth became regular features in many lodges.

One of the great problems in writing masonic history is the scarcity of early records. There are in existence Minutes which report the first-known conferment of the Royal Arch degree at Fredericksburg in Virginia in 1753. But we do not know when and where those who performed the ceremony were themselves advanced and we can only speculate upon those further back in time who first devised the ritual for it.

More important to our present purpose is the earliest surviving Minute to tell us of the making of a Knight Templar. This too was in America, at Boston in Massachusetts. The year was 1769, the date was 28 August. It was in St Andrew's Royal Arch Lodge. I resist the temptation to tell you more about that rather oddly-named body; it became St Andrew's Royal Arch Chapter and it still meets in Boston. But I will tell you the name of the candidate on that occasion; he was William Davis, a Past Master of a lodge which had been warranted ten years previously in the 14th Regiment of Foot, much later to be known as the West Yorkshires. The Minute is worth quoting, for we learn that Brother Davis, 'begging to have and receive the

Parts belonging to a Royal Arch Mason ... was accordingly made by receiving the four Steps, that of an [Excellent, Super-Excellent], Royal Arch and Knight Templar'. There is more to tell: also present were two other members of Brother Davis's travelling lodge (which was under the Antient Grand Lodge of England, not the original one of 1717) and there were three of the Royal Arch Lodge itself. But the admittedly modest gathering was strengthened by three members of Lodge No. 527 of the Irish Constitution and I do not have to remind many of those here today that that was then accredited to the 29th Foot and was one of the two military lodges which continue to this day to work under travelling warrants: Glittering Star, of course, in the Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment. Again I would remind you that all these participating brother knights must previously have been admitted. Where and when?

Some of you will know that R.V. Harris, an eminent Canadian masonic historian, wrote an excellent little pamphlet in 1966 about Lodge Glittering Star. Not only did he give a detailed account of the lodge's sojourn at Boston; he also infers that, before it arrived there when it was working at Halifax, Nova Scotia in the years from 1765 to 1768, it would there have been conferring the Royal Arch and Templar degrees.

I would have liked to have been able to tell you that Glittering Star was one of the lodges which had worked in Germany soon after its formation in 1759 and could itself have acquired the Templar element directly from the Strict Observance. But the story of the regiment does not allow for this and so we must resort, like Brother Harris, to inference and assume that it probably took the additional degrees from a sister military lodge during the first ten years of its own very long life.

We have, I hope - and you must still use a certain amount of imagination in this, enabled you to visualize a stretch of

masonic history in which - having dutifully worked in the three Craft degrees - not a few lodges, both travelling and stationary, could and would invite those not entitled to leave the room. They would then, not necessarily with the Master of the lodge in the chair, open up in the Royal Arch and other degrees and progressively advance those who had presented themselves for that purpose. That this sort of practice continued for quite some time is confirmed by ample evidence in the form of Minutes and - even more importantly - in the certificates which were issued to the brethren so advanced.

Time does not permit me to expand upon this particular theme but let me give an example from the year 1819, in which the Birr Lodge No.163 of Ireland was to hold thirty-one meetings. Its programme prescribed that fourteen of them were solely for 'Blue Masonry' - the Craft, twelve would be devoted to the Royal Arch and five to Knights Templar. Lest you should believe that this was largely an Irish practice, let me add that there is plenty of evidence to the contrary. At Cawnpore in India there was in 1857 evidence that a military brother of the English persuasion, who was also a victim of the massacre there, had acquired an imposing assortment of such additional degrees, almost all of which could only have been conferred under an authority which was for long supposed to be inherent in a Craft warrant.

But we are racing too far ahead of ourselves and must return to the previous century. As is well known, a Grand Royal Arch Chapter was formed in 1766 under the influence of the premier Grand Lodge of England, often and illogically referred to as 'the Moderns' to distinguish them from the 'Antients' who were a much younger organization. Eventually - and this is another story, and it covers a lengthy period - those who had received the Royal Arch degree through Craft lodges formed themselves into chapters and settled down under a central authority. At

different dates, and with numerous complications, Ireland and Scotland followed suit in this respect.

For a while, it was within Royal Arch chapters that further advancement beyond the Craft was to be sought but, in due time, Knights Templar also began the process of 'hiving off' as independent bodies. There is much interesting detail about this period, especially about happenings at Bristol which included the establishment of the Baldwin Encampment there.

At this point, however, I must introduce the name of Thomas Dunckerley - a name which crops up in so many chapters of masonic history. Merely note in passing that he was an illegitimate son of King George II, born to a domestic at Somerset House in London. He was later to be acknowledged as such and given a royal pension and it is somehow appropriate that, when a grace and favour apartment was first granted to him it was at Somerset House. He had retired from the Navy in 1766 and, from that time onwards, he became increasingly involved in masonic activity. He was soon to be appointed the first Provincial Grand Master for Hampshire and there is a famous Minute about his visit to a Royal Arch chapter at Portsmouth in 1769 when he, 'having lately received the Mark', conferred that degree upon the companions present. But much more relevant to our story is that, having by then assumed the office of Grand Superintendent in and over Hampshire, he wrote in 1778 to that same chapter 'authorizing them to make Knight Templars if they wanted to do so'. Now this is important evidence. It confirms that the practice of working the degree within a Royal Arch context was by then well known and it entitles us to assume that Dunckerley himself, who had been initiated in 1754 and - according to himself - exalted to the Royal Arch in the same year, had somewhere and at some time been admitted to the Order of the Temple. It further leads us to believe that the Portsmouth chapter already included in its membership enough knights to perform the ceremony.

It is not impossible to suppose that Dunckerley, who progressively assumed the rule of a further seven Craft Provinces and seventeen more of the Royal Arch, gave a similar dispensation to chapters in many different parts of the country. As has already been suggested, there came a stage when the knights so created began to form themselves into bodies, variously styled as conclaves or chapters of encampment, in which the so-called chivalric degrees could be conferred, leaving their Royal Arch chapters free to concentrate on what we now describe as the Holy Order.

So came into being the first of the Templar encampments and those which have survived from this period cherish their status as 'Time Immemorial'.

Dunckerley continues to engage our attention, for it was he who in 1791 - and we have only outlined the events which led to it - established a Grand Conclave in 1791 to which adhered seven of these early encampments. It is the bicentenary of that Grand Conclave's formation that we have so recently celebrated.

Thomas Dunckerley, our first Most Eminent and Supreme Grand Master, died in 1795. There were, over the next hundred years, not a few problems for his successors to deal with. One of the most difficult to describe in a few words is that which faced the Duke of Sussex, who governed the United Orders from 1812 until his death in 1843. He was, of course, the Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge from the Union of 1813 and many masonic historians have argued that he quite deliberately suppressed Templar activity for many years. You must look elsewhere for a fuller account, perhaps at the bicentenary volume entitled Brethren in Chivalry over which I laboured long and lovingly. But, with others, I believe that the Duke of Sussex took steps to ensure that our United Orders did not die out during a period when it was being propounded

that Freemasonry consisted only of the three Craft degrees and the Royal Arch and that all else was spurious.

In 1820 there was a disaster - disastrous in particular to the student of our history - when the house of Robert Gill, whom we would now describe as the Great Vice-Chancellor, was destroyed by fire and with it most of his records. Had it not been for the survival of some of Dunckerley's correspondence with the early encampments, and for the ^{present} later circulation of some printed Minutes, we would know very little of those years.

Let us pause in the onward march of events to consider the term 'United Orders' which I have more than once used.

As we have seen, firstly in the Craft lodges and then in the Royal Arch chapters, it had been the practice to work several of what may loosely be described as 'the additional degrees'. When in due time the lodges and the chapters were relieved of responsibility for these, we find that the Templar encampments had taken over those which were Christian in character. The varying full titles borne by the Grand Conclave give clues as to the Orders which were comprehended. From the outset there was included 'St John of Jerusalem, Palestine, Rhodes, etc.' and we may take leave to interpret the 'etcetera' as referring to Malta. And it is known that there was a Templar and Malta working in the lodges and Royal Arch chapters of many years previously but, whereas we have proposed a source for the Templar element in the Strict Observance, we cannot hazard a guess as to whence came that of Malta. A combined working continues in the Baldwyn Encampment at Bristol and is quite fascinating. At precisely what stage, for the rest of us, a separation into two degrees occurred is not known but the first official manuscript ritual for the Order of Malta alone was promulgated in 1866.

8

Up to the middle of the nineteenth century there was more to it than the two Orders of the Temple and Malta, whether combined or distinct. Grand Conclave certificates of 1843, for example, declare that the Duke of Sussex was 'the Most Eminent and Supreme Grand Master of the Royal and Exalted Religious and Military Orders of Heredom, Grand Elected Masonic Knights Templars Kadosh of St John of Jerusalem, Palestine, etc., etc., etc.'. If that is not sufficiently all-embracing, let us turn to one of the certificates issued by the Encampment of Union at Exeter in the same year. In this, not only does the heading refer also to the Knights of Malta but it continues with 'Most Puissant Sovereign Chapter Rosae Crucis and Ne Plus Ultra'. Furthermore, the text of the document records that its holder - having already attained knighthood in the previous degrees - had been 'initiated and confirmed in all the divine mysteries of the most Sacred and Holy Orders of Rosae Crucis and Ne Plus Ultra'.

Here again we have what was a well-established practice. For quite some time, in one forum or another, it had been possible for a Knight Templar to advance further to the degree of Rose Croix, not in these earlier times, the eighteenth of a thirty-three-degree system. Clearly an import from the Continent and almost certainly from France. The concept of progress upwards from the Order of the Temple to the degree of Sovereign Prince Rose Croix ^{ix} still obtains in Ireland and - yes - at Baldwyn in Bristol, but not ^{elsewhere} in England and ^{not in} Scotland. With the advent of the Ancient and Accepted Rite - and that, too, is another story: - and the establishment in England of a Supreme Council which dates from 1845, another hiving process gradually took place. Encampments of Knights Templar obtained warrants from the Supreme Council to hold quite separate Chapters Rose Croix and, in due course, restricted their own activities to working in the Temple and Malta degrees, as has ever since been the case.

There remains one small footnote: what of the Ne Plus Ultra degree? A question-mark certainly hangs over it and one school of thought claims that it is an alternative title for the Rose Croix, whereas another view, with an American flavour, equates it to Knight Kadosh, which we know as the thirtieth degree of the Ancient and Accepted Rite. But a manuscript ritual of 1830, probably in use at Newcastle, and a printed prayer book of 1850 for a Rose Croix Chapter in Dorset both reveal that it had a separate identity and a short ceremony of its own.

We move onward through the nineteenth century and time presses me to ask you to accept as fact that there had been formed a governing body for the United Orders in Ireland perhaps two or three years before our own Grand Conclave came into being in 1791. In Scotland it was in 1811 that a similar authority was established. This you need to know because we are coming up to the year 1872 when their story becomes, for a while, entangled with our own. It was in that year that a Convent General was formed to bring into one big, happy family the English Grand Conclave, the Irish Supreme Grand Encampment and the Scottish Royal Grand Conclave. Big the family may have been; happy, it certainly was not!

Scotland, wisely, decided to withdraw from the project. England and Ireland - without taking the views of the brother knights at ground level - carried on with the scheme. Within a couple of years there began to be received from all the English Provinces and from unattached encampments abroad what were in effect bitter complaints about what was proving to have been an impractical idea.

The Convent General had imposed changes: among them were the omission of the word 'Masonic' from the title of the United Orders and the abolition of Past Grand or Provincial rank which, in effect, meant reversion and loss of insignia at the

end of a term of office. Another nonsense was that they claimed, quite wrongly, that the masonic Orders had derived directly from their medieval counterparts. There were several other bones of contention but we have no time to define them all. Perhaps one of the most ludicrous impositions was a superior hierarchy under which the so-called National Great Priors of England and Ireland were to work and this necessitated the introduction of such offices as Arch Chancellor and Arch Registrar.

In the event, the Convent General was summoned to meet together on only nine occasions during its twenty-three years' existence and most of its regulations were probably conceived without proper consultation and had to be promulgated only in writing. A ritual which had been devised and made official was ignored, except - oddly enough - in Canada, whose Great Priory had for a limited period decided to adhere to the Convent General. But they escaped before too many years had passed.

Eventually, the Prince of Wales - who had agreed to preside over the Convent General - realized that it simply would not and could not work and he signed in 1895 a document which brought it to an end. Since then the Great Priors of England, Ireland and Scotland have been wholly independent of each other but in complete harmony.

A few of the decisions made by the Convent General did survive its collapse. For instance, they enacted that the encampments - ruled by Eminent Commanders - would become preceptories - with Eminent Preceptors at their head. They phased out the aprons which had long been a feature of a knight's clothing and introduced a tunic to be worn beneath the existing mantle. Caps were added, and a separate outfit was devised for wear in a Priory of Malta.

11

It is not surprising that an outcome of this unhappy period was the closure of many preceptories and that only a relatively modest number were added to the roll, most of these overseas where the dissension was not so apparent.

The restoration of the sovereign Great Priories in 1895 began an era of peaceful and relatively uneventful development which has continued for almost a hundred years. It is only in the reign of the present Grand Master that the word 'masonic' has been restored to our full title.

The gathering of brother knights from many countries, at the bicentenary celebrations, was significant in that not a few were ranged behind the Grand Masters of Great Priories and other governing bodies from Europe, the Commonwealth and the United States. Of these, several had been constituted by England or Scotland and had absorbed preceptories which had formerly worked under warrants from the United Kingdom.

Many of these will be forever grateful to the travelling military lodges who, from the earlier part of our story, can be seen to have passed the Orders of the Temple and Malta to their successors, who in turn made them available to the masonic knights of today.