

THE WARDENS' COLUMNS

One of the most frequently corrected errors in lodge procedure is the failure of a Warden to raise or lower his column appropriately. Let an absent-minded Junior Warden forget to lower his column when the lodge is called from refreshment to labor, and many a frantic gesture from the side lines will remind him of his dereliction!

Almost every Brother sitting in the lodge room knows the proper position of the Wardens' columns during labor or at refreshment, and will hasten to signal a Warden if the emblem of his office is awry. "Up in the West during labor; down in the West at refreshment. Down in the South during labor; up in the South at refreshment." Every Brother knows that simple rule for positioning the Wardens' columns.

It is generally believed, as stated in Mackey's Encyclopedia, that the Senior Warden's column represents the pillar Jachin, while the Junior Warden's column represents the pillar Boaz, those having been impressive adornments on the Porch of King Solomon's Temple. Their names signify Establishment and Strength.

Some Brethren will explain that the Wardens' columns are miniature representations of the pillars usually stationed in the West, where at one time both Wardens sat, one in the shade of Boaz, the other in the shade of Jachin. Such an arrangement of the Wardens' positions may still be found in some European lodges whose rituals have come from Continental sources.

As a matter of fact, the raising and lowering of the Wardens' columns made their first appearance in Masonic ritual as late as 1760, well into the period known as Speculative Masonry. The Three Distinct Knocks, a well-known expose of Masonic ritual published in London that year, contains the first description of the Wardens' use of their columns. An almost identical description of the Wardens' raising and lowering their columns appears in another expose, Jachin and Boaz, published in 1762.

To those who like Masonic traditions neat and historically logical, it may be disconcerting to learn that in some lodges the Wardens did not have columns on their pedestals. They had truncheons, whose modern function is to serve as billy clubs for policemen. An Irish lodge in the 18th century had a by-law reading: "there is to be silence at the first chap of the Master's haler, and likewise at the first stroke of each Trench struck by the Senior and Junior Wardens." The Rev. George Oliver

(1782-1867), a prolific writer about Freemasonry, quotes an inventory of a lodge at Chester, England, in 1761, which includes "two truncheons for the Wardens." There are still lodges today which denominate the Wardens' emblems of authority as truncheons, not columns.

There can be no doubt that the Wardens' columns are the result of Freemasonry's interest in the art of building, of architecture and its allied skills and sciences. The operative masons devoted much time and thought to the design, construction, and ornamentation of columns and pillars. The orders of architecture were an important body of knowledge with which they were continuously concerned.

In many of the earliest documents of the Craft, the so-called "Old Charges" or "manuscript constitutions", some of which antedate the period, of Speculative Freemasonry by at least 300 years, those primitive pillars of the sons of Lamech are a part of the "history" of the operative Craft. The Temple of Solomon is inconspicuously mentioned, but the two pillars on the porch of that temple do not appear at all.

It was not until approximately 1700 that King Solomon's Pillars began to appear in Masonic writing and ritual documents. The Dumfries, No. 4 MS, usually dated 1700-1725, mentions those pillars and gives them a strong Christian symbolism. It also answers two test questions about pillars as follows: "How many pillars is in your Lodge"? Three. What are these? Ye square, the Compas and ye bible."

In A Mason's Examination, 1723, appears this test question: "Where was the first Lodge kept? In Solomon's Porch; the two Pillars were called Jachin and Boaz." Nothing, however, establishes a connection between the pillars and the Wardens. The Grand Mystery, etc. mentioned above also names the two pillars Jachin and Boaz. A number of other such publications in the 1720's and 1730's also identify them by those names.

How miniature representations of Jachin and Boaz came to the pedestals of the Senior and Junior Wardens is still a matter for speculation; obviously it is a part of the variegated development of Masonic ritual in the 18th century. As symbols of the pillars on the Porch of King Solomon's Temple, or as representations of the three principal orders of architecture which the three principal officers of a lodge symbolize, they are to be found in the earliest catechisms and lectures of Speculative Freemasonry.

Undoubtedly, as suggested by contemporary references and illustrations, the pillars soon became artistically designed pieces of furniture to stand in the lodge room as objects for study. There was probably no uniformity of practice in this development. Some lodges had large columns, some small, some drew them on the floor cloth. Some had no pillars at all. From the creation of such pillars, and from their association with the three principal officers of the lodge undoubtedly came the columns of the Wardens. They are relics of those earlier larger pieces of lodge furniture. From the traditions of operative craft lodges had lingered the conception of the Senior Warden as the officer in charge of the workmen; his column naturally represented his authority and superintendence. To give the Junior Warden some similar authority, an imaginative speculative ritualist probably hit on the idea of putting him in charge of the Craft during refreshment. That idea had been foreshadowed in Anderson's 1723 Constitutions; Regulation XXIII put the Grand Wardens in charge of the annual Feast. By 1760, as suggested by the publication of Three Distinct Knocks, the Wardens of a lodge had acquired miniature columns representing the pillars, Jachin and Boaz, which they carried in processions and raised or lowered on their pedestals to indicate whether the lodge was at labor or refreshment. That procedure was apparently confirmed by the Lodge of Promulgation which paved the way for the union in 1813 of the "Modern" and "Ancient" Grand Lodges in England.

Thus the raising and lowering of the Wardens' columns became sanctioned by custom and Grand Lodge approval. It is not a complicated or mysterious symbolic act; it is a simple means to indicate silently to entering Brethren the status of the lodge.

Since the Junior Warden's column is erect during refreshment, logic suggests that it be similarly arranged when the lodge is closed, i.e., not at labor. Generally, however, the Wardens' columns are left just as they happen to be placed at the time of closing, except in those Jurisdictions whose official ritual has decreed a proper positioning of the Wardens' columns at closing.