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THE RITE OF CIRCUMAMBULATION," by Rt. Wor. Bro. J. J. Pickett, P.G.W.

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The following, which I am about to read, was copied from some Masonic publication, many years ago—so long ago that I cannot recall when, but it must have been more than twenty years, so that I am unable to name the writer.

In the 48th Psalm Verses 12 and 13, it reads thus

"Walk about Zion and go round

"About her; Tell the towers thereof.

"Mark ye well her bulwarks ;

"Consider her palaces; that ye may

"Tell it to the generations following."

Circumambulation is the name given by sacred archaeologists to that religious rite in ancient initiations which consisted in a formal procession round the Altar or other holy and consecrated objects.

The same rite in a peculiar form is used in Masonry. To give the Brethren some idea of the age of this Rite or Ceremony, I will quote from the works of one who was well qualified to write about it . . . "In ancient Greece, when the priests were engaged in the rite of sacrifice, they and the assembled people always walked three times round the Altar, meanwhile singing a sacred hymn. In making this procession great care was taken to move in imitation of the course of the Sun, and for this purpose, they commenced at the East, and, passing on by way of the South to West and thence by the North,, they arrived at the East again."

By this means, as it will be observed, the right hand was always placed at, or towards, the Altar. This Ceremony, the Greeks called "moving **from** the right **to** the right," which was the direction of the motion. The Romans applied to it the term "dextrovorsum" or "dextrorsum." Thus, Plautus makes Palinurus—a character in his Comedy of Curculio — say, "if you would do reverence to the Gods, you must turn to the right hand." A hymn of Callimachus has been preserved, which is said to have been chanted by the priests of Apollo at Delos, while performing the ceremony of circumambulation, the substance of which is, "We imitate the example of the Sun and follow his benevolent course."

Among the Romans the ceremony of circumambulation was always used in the rites of sacrifice. Virgil describes one Chorinaeus as purifying his companions at the funeral of Misenius by passing three times around them while aspersing them with the lustral waters, and to do this conveniently it was necessary that he should move with his right hand towards them.

It was the custom to unite the ceremony of circumambulation with that of expiation or purification, or, in other words, to make a circuitous procession in performing the latter rite, so that the term "lustrare"—the primitive meaning of which is to "purify"—came at last to be synonymous with "circuive"—to walk round about anything, and hence a "circumambulation" and a "purification" were often expressed by the same word.

The Hindus practised the rite of circumambulation. A Brahmin, upon first rising from his bed in the morning, having adored the Sun while directing his face to the East, then walks towards the West by way of the South, at the same time saying, "I follow the course of the Sun," which he thus explains : "As the Sun in his course, moves round the world by way of the South, so do I follow that luminary to obtain the benefit arising from a journey around the earth by way of the South."

The Druids' mystical dance around the Cairn, or Sacred Stones was nothing more nor less than the rite of circumambulation. On these occasions the priest always made these circuits from East to West by the right hand around the Altar, accompanied by all the worshippers, and so sacred was the rite considered, that in the Scottish Isles (which were once a principal seat of the Druidical religion) the people never came to the ancient sacrificing and fire hallowing Cairns but that they walked round them three times from East to West according to the course of the Sun.

There is little doubt but that this rite of circumambulation is a "left over" from the practice of Sun worship. It is not to be wondered at that the Ancients worshipped the Sun, for it has all the grandeur, power and character of a God, and, in its daily course, in lights and shadows, there is no end of marvellous things. There were many other things used in Sun worship, which have become parts of **our** worship —the rough edges knocked off, and the forms polished to meet the requirements of the Christian age.

In olden days, the people had plenty of time for circumambulation. They did not depend upon express trains or fast steamers for their motive power. They were children of Nature, almost all of their time out in her vast domains, and so were enabled to study her works, and admire her beauties. These were pleasures which are not ours.

In the Lodge the circumambulation is for another purpose. It is to mark well the fact that the candidate is in possession of all necessary qualifications for advancement and progress. There is something more in this rite of circumambulation than a mere walk round the Lodgeroom. It has a deep and significant symbolism. In the general Ahiman Rezon there found this excellent explanation of the rite -

"The rite of the Wanderer or the symbolic pilgrimage, is entirely puerile and unmeaning, unless we have learned in what ideas it originated, and what its authors intended to represent by it. The mystic journey primarily represented the toilsome progress of humanity from its primitive condition of ignorance and barbarism, to a state of civilization and mental enlightenment. The Neophyte therefore, wandering in darkness over his winding way, meeting with various obstructions and delays, was a type of the human race, struggling onward "and upward by devious stages, from the gloom and darkness of the savage state, to the light, intelligence, and comfort of civilized life."

The symbolic journey is also emblematical of the pilgrim-age of life. This primary step in journeying towards the light, is, as it were, the same as that of the infant, which is ushered into the world with a cry as of pain. In like manner, the pilgrim, about to be initiated into Freemasonry, is first made to feel the pierce of pain, as a reminder that now his journey has begun.

The babe is not long released from the womb of silence and darkness, before there ascends to Heaven, prayers for his guidance and protection, and Masonry, when the poor, blind, and naked Neophyte comes to her, offers prayers that God will vouchsafe to guide and protect, the seeker after that which is now hidden from him. Assurance is given, that, trust being in God, Faith is well founded, and that no fear need be felt for future progress. The journey begins, and halt is made at the S.W. and E.

Youth, Manhood, and Age are halting places in life's career, and before, one advances from one to the other, it would be well if the qualifications and preparations were closely enquired into.

The Youth and the Man have someone to vouch for them.

The Youth has the love of his Mother and the influence of home as a protection and an encouragement to go forward.

The Man, as he reaches the pinnacle of his majority, and steps out into the avenue of life to do battle for himself, his honour, and his home, has the training of the past and an education in those things that are needful for success and improvement.

At last, the East of life—old age—is reached. Days and nights have been passed, struggle and toil have been endured; there have been times when courage and hope were strong, and there have been days when doubt and despair prevailed.

But the end is now not far off. The Candidate is instructed how to approach the E. and the Altar.

The old man has learned in his pilgrimage, that only by being upright and manly, can he receive the benison of Eternal Light. He approaches the Altar of the Grave—all is for a moment dark. Then the Supreme Architect — the Great Creator, says, "Let there be Light." The hoodwink of mortality is dropped and the glorious light of Immortality dawns upon the pilgrim of Earth.

Such are some of the thoughts which may well be entertained by us in connection with this rite of circumambulation. Doubtless many Brethren call to mind several wanderers who walked with them in the past and who have now reached the East and are in God's Etherial Mansions.

In our Lodges we may learn many lessons which should prove useful to us in the hustle and bustle of the outside world and we should be mindful of the obligations we are under to Freemasonry. It should widen our views of men, broaden our charity for them, and extinguish bigotry and prejudice from our hearts.

The rite of circumambulation, so far as mortals on this earth are concerned, cannot be continued far beyond three score and ten, but when the years shall have come to an end as a tale that is told, I trust that we may all be as well satisfied with our "walk around" earth as we are at this present time.

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The writer of the above continues thus

I shall close this short paper by mentioning, that only the other evening, I witnessed what, to me, appeared to be an innovation in the ceremony of Installation of Worshipful Master—at any rate I have not seen it practised before. On the occasion referred to, the Worshipful Master elect, before being permitted to take the O.B. with respect to his duties as Master, was solemnly conducted round the Lodge three times by the two presenting Past-masters. The Master elect was preceded y a Bro. carrying the V. of the S.L. and this Bros. was supported by the two Deacons, with their Wands crossed. Like the priests of Ancient Greece already mentioned, the procession commenced and finished at the East. Whether this was, or was not an innovation, I have no doubt that the fundamental idea underlying the ceremony, was the purification of the Candidate before his installation, in order that the term of his rule might prove truly beneficial, both to the Brethren of his Lodge and to the Craft generally.

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Wor. Master, I should like to point out to the Brethren before concluding this reading, that the course of the Sun in this, the Southern hemisphere, is from the East, **Northwards** to the West and not by way of the South. As Sun worship originated in mystical Egypt, where learning **also** originated, and from whence it spread, it follows naturally, that to the Egyptian priests and to the philosophers of Greece, the Sun would make its daily journey from East to West, by way of the South.