

King vs High Priest

The following comment, elicited by a remark on the nomenclature of the chief officers of Ireland's Grand Chapter, will be read with interest:

"It will be observed that the King is the presiding officer. This is in accordance with English methods, and is a general, although not a universal, custom with Grand Chapters of the British Dominions. It is said that our American ancestors, while willing to dedicate their Chapters in the name of a Viceroy, were unwilling to have any one bearing the title even of a King to preside over them, and so organized Capitular Masonry in this country that the High Priest was made presiding officer and the representative of the King was given to sit in the second place in the Council, but in the enumeration of the officers he was placed below the Scribe. Companions will remember that Zerubbabel was the Prince, and the order in which their names are rehearsed is Joshua, Haggai and Zerubbabel. We follow the work, but we do think this last lick is quite an unnecessary and inconvenient piece of American democracy."

There it is, in a nutshell, but had we put the case in the forcible but eminently truthful words of Companion Duncan, the entire corps reportorial would have found a delightful topic to break up the monotony.

"Then rose up Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak and began to build the House of God, at Jerusalem, and with them were, the prophets of God helping them." Ezra 5:2.

It has frequently been a matter for remark that the United States system of the Royal Arch should have given precedence to the High Priest, when it is made clear throughout the entire Biblical narrative of the second Temple, that Zerubbabel was the leader assisted by the High Priest and supported by the advice and encouragement of Haggai and the prophets. In our own system the placing of Haggai before Joshua is probably an error. Comp. Duncan's opinion as to why an inferior place was given to the King is probably held by others, but they are not so outspoken. But although Zerubbabel was the lineal descendant of the royal house of David he was at no time dubbed a king. He was the Prince of the people," however, and their leader as Governor of Judea. His relegation to an inferior position seems to have been the brilliant idea of the great American ritual reformer of the period. How in the name of all that's consistent, that teeming democratic brain failed when remodelling the earlier degrees, to foment a revolt at the building of the first Temple and so place the Tyrian architect in supreme authority as "President, is beyond comprehension. It would have been just as easy for him to drop Solomon and the royal Hiram a peg each and thus maintain the glorious principles for which he worked and apparently succeeded in his reconstruction of the subsequent degrees.

Zerubbabel, Joshua and Haggai, Prince, High Priest and Prophet (not Scribe), were the chiefs of the Sanhedrim, the first mentioned being accorded full authority by the decree of King Cyrus.

"The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, his hands shall also finish it." Zech. 4: 9.

But when the ingenious ritual reformer undertook to change things, the days of kings and princes on his portion of the continent had passed. Hence Companion Duncan's observation, "an unnecessary and inconvenient piece of American democracy."

Sources:

Proceedings of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Canada at the annual convocation, 1904, report on Foreign Correspondence - LOUISIANA.