

CODE FOR COLORED MAN.

Freemasonry Used in Connection with the "Underground."

MEN BOUND BY OATH

Ritual of the Several Degrees
Written by William Lambert of Detroit.

WAS ROAD "MANAGER."

A LITTLE less than half a century ago the "underground railroad" was one of the most-talked-of institutions of this country, next, of course, to the civil war. But although seventy years have passed since it first started in its business of running slaves from the Southern States to freedom in Canada, and although columns have been written about it, and adventures without number been chronicled, until today the secret signs, grips and passwords, the ritual which bound the secret society together, have never been made public.

The underground railroad, as it was called, really had behind it a gigantic organization of whites and blacks, bound together by secret signs and vows. The white man was admitted to but a few of the degrees, many of them but to one, a side degree called "The Degree of Confidence," which pertained entirely to the working of the railroad. But behind that, and of which this side degree was a part, was an oathbound organization, of which 60,000 or more negroes were members bound together by oaths of the severest character.

This ritual, prepared by a colored man, William Lambert of Detroit, compares favorably with the ritual of modern societies of the Caucasian race. It is full of imagery and increases in interest from degree to degree. The full purport of the society also is gradually unfolded, so that not until one reaches the last degree does the candidate attain to its full import.

That object was no less than the political ascendancy of the colored race, not only in this country, but in every land on the globe, Malays and Filipinos included.

The ritual of this organization, which was known as the "African-American Mysterious," was written by William Lambert, and a few years ago his own copy of it was placed in the hands of the Rev. John Albert Williams, rector of St. Phillip the Deacon (the colored Episcopal church) of Omaha, Neb., with other material, to enable him to write the history of the founder. From him the books were secured for this article.

Written by a Colored Man.

William Lambert, the author of this ritual, was chosen as the manager of the underground railroad. He was the son of a slave, yet, as the ritual shows, was a man of education and of brilliant mind. He was a personal friend of Gerrit Smith, William Lloyd Garrison, and Wendell Phillips. His energy was great and he trained it all in the direction of elevating his colored brethren.

By his means, that is, by the underground railroad—the workings of which will be described later, nearly 40,000 slaves were carried across into the freedom of Canada, between the years 1820 and 1862, when the last one was ferried over. In the last twenty of these years the sum of \$120,000 was collected and expended in the work.

In all about 50,000 slaves were freed, but a few of these escaped without the aid of the underground railroad. The larger number were brought from Florida and Louisiana and never for days were they left unprotected on their journey. Their dangers and their hardships were shared by their conductors, who were able by secret codes to communicate with each other, and by signs and passwords and grips to distinguish the members of this secret society from those who might betray them.

The code of the underground railroad was simple, made so that the lowest of slaves might master it if necessary. And yet the genius of William Lambert made it extremely effective. Its simplicity was its safeguard.

It was necessary to send messages from one station to another whenever a body of slaves was being slipped from the South to the North. To have done so in plain English would have been to invite capture. Mr. Lambert invented the following simple code which was nevertheless sufficiently large to meet all requirements.

"Hoes" meant "men or slaves."
"Buy liquid" meant they were coming "by water."
"Buy bar," that they were on the railroad.

Hence a message reading "Buy liquid and twenty hoes" would readily be understood by the initiated to mean "Twenty men coming by water."
"Long" represented "guns" and "short" meant revolvers, pistols, or knives.

The stations were numbered thus: No. 1, Detroit; No. 2, Suspension Bridge; No. 3, Cleveland; No. 4, Ashtabula; No. 5, Buffalo.

Thus a message reading "Buy bar and ten hoes long at No. 3" would be understood at once to mean "Ten men sent by railroad at Cleveland. Bring guns."

There were six tenders in this underground railroad, and each was known by his Christian name only in this code. Thus, Tell Samuel, meant telegraph to Samuel Lowery, Chatham. Tell Augustus, telegraph Augustus R. Green, Windsor. Tell William, telegraph William Lambert, Detroit. Tell Charles, telegraph Charles H. Langston, Cleveland. Tell John, telegraph to John Brown, Dorset. (This was Ossawatimie Brown.)

In addition to this, a figure cipher was used for more minute descriptions or information. The letters of the alphabet from A to G were numbered backward, and represented by the figures 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. From H to L they were numbered in like manner, but the next division, from M to Q, were reversed, M being 13 and Q 17. R to Y they were numbered backward again from 22 down to 13. The number 23 was given to the character "&," W was 27, and Z 24.

All the directors and conductors of the "railroad" were bound by oath, and united by grips, passwords, and signs. This organization, which included 60,000 negroes, was called "The African-American Mysterious Order of Men of Oppression Gathering."

The lower degrees were three in number, captives, redeemed, and chosen.

Form of Initiation:

Over the head and face of the candidate a coarse cloth was drawn; his hands were pinned behind him; outer garments were bled off and a ragged pair of pantaloons, badly torn behind, put on; a chain was placed around his neck, by which he was led to the door, when these questions were asked:

"Who is this?"
"A captive."
"What are the marks of captivity?"
"He is blinded by a cap, a fetter about his neck, hands tied behind, barefooted, and debased in garments tattered and torn."
"What does this captive seek?"
"Deliverance."
"How does he expect to gain it?"
"By his own efforts."
"What should characterize these efforts?"
"Self-reliance, guarded by secrecy."
"Is he willing to take an oath?"
"He is."
"What are the consequences if he violates it?"
"The vengeance of a just God and the anger of an outraged and oppressed people everywhere."
The captive was then admitted to the lodge-room and knelt before the altar, where he took this vow:
"I, A. B., in the presence of Jehovah and solemnly, and unscrupulously vow, that I never will in any manner make known even the least of the secrets of the men of oppression, except to myself; hoping if I should do so that I may receive the vengeance of a just God and the chastisement of an outraged and oppressed people."
The first ruler then asked: "Captive, do you believe that all men are born free and equal and justly entitled to the enjoyment of liberty?" to which he answered "I do," and

the whole gathering responded, "So do we all believe."

The question, "Do you believe in that redemption that the voice of Jehovah and reason promise?" is likewise responded to by all.

The candidate then took this promise:
"I, A. B., a captive of oppression, in the presence of great Jehovah and this gathering of captives, do most seriously and religiously promise obedience to a ruler or any other faithful brother captive, whenever I may be admonished for an error, especially when coming from one of authority."

Ruler—Captive, remember your solemn promise, for if you fail to fulfill it behold the weapon is lifted and the hand is ready to strike.

The cap was removed and the candidate found himself surrounded by armed men in the attitude of striking.

Had Also Grips and Signs.

The grip was given by gently grasping the hand, arm, or other part of the body and gently pressing it with the ends of the thumb and forefinger.

The sign was given by putting the end of the right thumb and forefinger together and slipping the thumb down to the crease of the first joint. This was immediately answered by placing the thumb across the same crease.

The word was "Welcome."
The following test conversation was used when strangers met.

"Have you been at a gathering?"
"Where?" "In ——" (naming some place).
"Why?" "I thought I saw you there?"
"You are welcome to think as you please."
"I think we are acquainted." "I am always happy to meet an acquaintance."

It will be seen that this test was not likely to arouse suspicion if the first part of it was given to an outsider, and the second reply would let the interrogator know if the other was not one of the "captives."

The captive was brought in with his hands tied together before him with a rope linked so as to imitate a chain; as he advanced he exclaimed, "Am I not a man and a brother?" Kneeling on one knee he remained until the vow was administered. This vow was little different from the one in the first degree.

The sign was given by placing the end of the thumb against the end of the forefinger, as in the preceding degree, and then moving it to the end of the middle finger as if unconsciously counting the fingers. The answer was given by placing the end of the thumb on the crease of the first joint of the forefinger and then moving it on the crease of the second joint of the same finger. The grip was given as in the preceding degree, with the addition of the end of the middle finger pressed against the point in contact with them.

The password for the second degree was "Many."

The sign of the chosen, or third degree, was given by placing the end of the thumb against the end of the forefinger as in the Redeemed, then to the end of the third finger and slipping it down to the first, second, and third creases of the joints of the same finger, all done in a manner of studiously counting to one's self. The answer was given as in the preceding degree, unconsciously counting the creases of the three joints of the inside of the third finger of the right hand with the thumb of the same hand.

The grip was given, by taking hold of the hand, wrist, shoulder, or any part of the body as in the two preceding degrees and making a sensible impression on the part in contact with the ends of the thumb and the first three fingers to be answered in the same way.

The password for this was "Reckon."
After the signs were explained the Ruler said: "I am glad to reckon you among the chosen," and Lev. xxv, 44 to 43, was read as a charge.

When any member wished to know if another person was really one of the "Chosen" this test was used.

"Have you ever been at a gathering?"
"Where?" "In ——" (naming a place).
"Why?" "I think I seen you there?"
"You are at liberty to think as you please."
"I think I counted you among the many."
"I am glad to reckon you among my many acquaintances."

The costume of the Redeemed was a tunic or short, loose hunting shirtlike gown with a hood to it, representing an emancipated planter slave. He carried a reed or spear in his hand; in the Chosen degree the tunic was blue and the hood thrown back from the head.

The Degree of "Confidence."

To these three degrees was added a fourth, side degree particularly intended for underground railroad operations. It was called the degree of Confidence. The vow was:

"I, A. B., do most solemnly, religiously, and unreservedly vow, that I will never confer the degree of Confidence on any person, black or white, male or female, unless I am really satisfied after a most careful examination, that they are trustworthy and true friends of the oppressed. Hoping should I violate this solemn covenant that my domestic interests and happiness may become blasted and I personally denounced, regarded and treated as a traitor to humanity."

The sign was given by placing the first joint of the forefinger of the right hand across the same joint of the corresponding finger of the left hand. The answer was given by placing the first joint of the thumb of the left hand across the first crease of the forefinger.

The grip was given by taking each other by the two first fingers of the right hand.

Word—"Lepron."
Pass word—"Crossover," always given in halves. The test for this degree and which was used by thousands while helping escaped slaves was:

"Have you ever been on the railroad?"
"I have been a short distance."
"Where did you start from?"
"The depot."
"Where did you stop?"
"At a place called safety."
"You have a brother there—I know him."
"I know you know—you traveled on the road."

The emblems of the degrees were: Captives, fetters and whips; redeemed, clasped hands and chain; chosen, broken fetters or chain, links scattered about, and a diamond pointed spear.

But this wonderful society had other degrees for the initiated to pass through, to which the preceding three were but the portico, and it was not until the last four of the seven were reached that the candidate began to learn the true lesson of the order. The fourth degree was called "Degree of Rulers," and was founded upon Numbers xi, 1 to 35. Among the preliminary questions asked of the candidate was this one, "What should distinguish a ruler?" with the reply, "Wisdom, firmness, and justice."

The Premier, being warned of the candidate's approach, said: "Let him approach and say to him, 'Be not wise in thy own conceit, lest thou art proven a fool,'" and as he entered Proverbs vii, was read. When halted before the "judgment seat," the Premier asked: "Are you opposed to oppression of every kind?" "Do you declare eternal hostility to slavery?" "Do you believe that resistance to tyranny is obedience to God?" These being answered in the affirmative, the Premier continued:

"Brother, then in view of a brighter and more glorious prospect in our future, we ask of you a vow, which, like all others you have taken, is sacred before God and man. Kneel at the shrine of the Most High." The oath was:

"I, A. B., one of the chosen, in presence of great Jehovah and this wise council of rulers, do most seriously, solemnly, religiously, and unreservedly vow, that I will never by speaking writing, signs, or in any other way make known the secrets of the men of oppression, except to that I am in favor of striking the shackles from every human being in the world, unjustly deprived of liberty, and will do all in my power to consummate so glorious an end; ever acting with prudence and discretion, not to compromise my own interests, not those of my family, and friends; hoping, should I do so, that the accepter of Jehovah may disable my left arm instantly paralyzing it by letting the left arm hang by the side and rubbing it as though feeling it. The answer by counting the end of the four fingers of the right hand with the end of the right thumb. The grip was given by taking hold of a person by the left arm on the swell of the muscle in a friendly familiar manner, and pressing sensibly, the ends of the four fingers against the muscles. The answer was the same. The word was "scepter," and was given by whispering it in the left ear by halves.

Details of Fifth Degree.

In the fifth degree the candidate is represented as "welcomed in captivity, numbered in and among the redeemed, reckoning among the chosen, elected a ruler, and now expected to be appointed a judge." The preliminary questions were: "Do you desire the political ascendancy of the colored race?" "Do you include in these the

African and mixed races as found in North, South, and Central America, the West Indies, the Indian, the Malay, Mongolian, and all other of the colored races who are true to our race?" "Do you promise never to consent to the initiation of any white person into the mysteries of this order?" "Do you enter the judgment hall with the determination to make renewed efforts to attain an equality with our oppressors?" Having answered these in the affirmative the candidate knelt before the shrine and took a solemn vow never to reveal the secrets and never to be present at the initiation of a white person, "hoping, should I fail to faithfully perform the same, that the thunder bolt of Jehovah's wrath may shatter my right elbow, disabling the arm forever."

The sign was given by carefully taking hold of the right elbow with the left hand, supporting the arm as it were in an oblique horizontal position. The answer was given by counting the ends of the fingers of the right hand with the thumb of the same, adding the little finger of the left, which was touched by the forefinger of the right while the grip was given by taking hold of the left elbow of a colleague with the right hand and pressing the ends of the thumb and fingers against it. The answer was the same. Word—"Thunderbolt," whispered in halves in each other's right ear. Password—"Wrath."

In the sixth degree, or Chevaliers of Ethiopia, the candidate, dressed in an Oriental garb, slowly passes around through various meanderings, representing a journey through a dense and dreary wilderness, while Gen. x, 6-20, is read. They halt before the officers, representing Nimrod enfeebled, consulting with his chief officers, the sons of Canaan. A long vow is taken, closing with:

"And I will ever endeavor fully to carry out the entire object of this organization, which is the political ascendancy of the col-

ored races, throughout the world; because, numerically, they would be and must have been designed by heaven to have the controlling influence among the children of men. Hoping that if I fail to do so the displeasure of Jehovah may strike me instantly deaf."

In this degree the work was rich in ritual. After the vow the candidate, taking up a battle-axe, began his journey. Reaching "the gap" he encountered a guard, who gave him the traveler's pass. This was made by resting their battle axes over each other's shoulders, the inside of the ax against the back of the neck, and catching the judge's grip with their left hands, they whisper the wilderness pass as follows: "Nimrod," "Ludin." At the blast of a trumpet "the seclusion" was exposed, showing the four princes. Here the mountain pass was given the candidate, the ax replaced by a sword, and the pilgrim continued his journey. This sign was given by pressing the hilt of each other's swords against the other's left ear, while they whisper "Horev" by syllables.

The password was demanded again at the river and was refused. A battle ensued, in which the traveler was victorious. He gathered fruit and returned to "the seclusion," where a banquet was held. After the feast the ceremonies continued in the seventh degree of Sterling Black Knights, or Knight of St. Domingo.

After being challenged and giving the pass many times a curtain was drawn aside exposing, under an altar, bones and skeletons. Revelation vi, 9 was read. Upon the top of the altar were twelve candlesticks, with five-cornered bottoms. These candles represented the twelve tribes and the five points the fifth seal. The premier took a human skull from under the altar, which he handed to the candidate, who, holding it in his right hand, repeated this seal of all obligations:

"I kiss this skull, hoping should I violate the secrets of these, my sacred obligations, that the

departed spirit which once inhabited it may haunt and torment my soul forever.

The Premier, dipping his hand in a vase of water, sprinkled the candidate; then dipping his thumb in a vase of oil anointed him, saying, as he placed the sword first on the left shoulder, then on the head, and finally on the right shoulder:

I baptize, anoint, and consecrate you in the name of Nimrod, the mighty hunter; Jethro, the priest of Midian; and the Eunuch of Candacta, a Chevalier of Ethiopia.

Then placing the sword first on the right shoulder, then on the head, and finally on the left shoulder, he said:

In the name of Toussaint L'Overture, Alexander Petion, and Jean Jacques Dessalines, I baptize, anoint, and consecrate you a sterling, Black Knight or Knight of St. Domingo.