

1824: William Gilbert's Last Year

Thanks to Patricia Cline Cohen who first located Gilbert's obituary and his residence in Augusta, and to Sue Thomas who discovered further *Augusta Chronicle* articles, and provided supplementary information on their contents (See *TLS Letter to Editor*, 18 Jan 2019).

The following advertisement – repeated in every twice-weekly issue over two months from 14 February 1824 – shows how important Masonry was to Gilbert (as Marsha Keith Schuchard has long maintained).

***Augusta Chronicle*, 14 February to 14 April 1824**

To be published by Subscription,
AN ORATION,

Delivered before the Lodge at Columbia, in S. Carolina, on St. John's Day, 1806. By Wm. Gilbert.

Printed with the approbation of several of the most respectable Masons.

Subscriptions will be received at the Bookstore of W.J.Hobby, and at the Globe and Eagle Taverns, City and Planter's Hotels. Price one dollar.

Feb. 14

181 tf

***Augusta Chronicle*, 21 February to 3 March 1824**

A Card

Mr. Gilbert in his proposals posted at several houses in town, for publishing by subscription a Masonic Oration, inadvertently omitted, that he would, if encouraged, reprint 'The Hurricane' in the same volume; with as much as the the Notes as he would have republished, had Mr. Bristed and Dr. Southey taken no notice of it.

Feb. 21

183 tf

Gilbert's announcement reveals the 'indignation' he felt on reading Southey's *Life of Wesley* (1820). Southey wrote that Gilbert's 'madness was of the most incomprehensible kind, as may be seen in the notes to the Hurricane'. *The Hurricane* was also condemned as the work of '[a]n obscure madman' by John Bristed in *The Resources of the United States of America* (1818). Gilbert not only stands by his 'vituperated Notes', he doubles up, by detecting biblical references to America in Psalms and Revelation. (Biblical sources in square brackets have been inserted editorially).

***Augusta Chronicle*, 3 March 1824**

Notice.

In addition to the Masonic Oration heretofore advertised in this paper, will be published in the same volume, 'The Hurricane a *Theological and Western Eclogue*,' for the notes to which Mr. Bristed and Dr. Southey have honoured the author with the title of a *madman*. The author assures the public, that these vituperated Notes will be published with only such corrections as a lapse of more than twenty-seven years

has suggested without any reference to the opinion of the two gentlemen above named. He could justly alter the title to American Masonry: but he prefers the leaving to it, the name by which it is already known.

Why think of this new title? Mr. Dobbs, member of the Irish, and of the first Imperial Parliament, and called the Irish Prophet, has asserted that America is nowhere to be found in scripture: it is not *in nomine* most certainly, but when David says 'O: that I had *wings* like a *dove*: then would I fly away and be at *rest*—I would take me *far* off into the *wilderness*,' [Ps 55:6] etc. he certainly comes very near to describing the first English settlements in America, by fugitives from persecution. All critics on scripture prophecy, that I have met with, agree in considering *wings* as *sails*: and Columbus comes, in the Latin, as near to *Columba*, as the difference of genders will permit; so that *Columbus* is nearly as distinctly named by David, as Cyrus was by Isaiah. There says the latter, 'the glorious Lord shall be unto us, a place of broad rivers and streams,' etc. a description which suits the American better than any other continent. We will return to David, his 87th psalm, 'I will think upon Rahab and Babylon, with them that know me, the Philistines also and *them of Tyre* with the Morians, Lo! there was he born.' *Tyre*, I believe, is universally allowed to be, in prophecy, the greatest naval power in any contemplated era; and the *Morians* to be Africans generally. 'And of Zion, it shall be *reported* that he was born in her; and the Most High shall establish her.' Let us say, *in reported Zion*; i.e. what shall be called, *in common parlance*, Zion; namely, the truly devoted Church of God. [']The Lord shall recite it, when he writeth on the people, that this man was borne there: *All my fresh springs* shall be in Thee.' [Ps 87:5–7 var.] It will be perceived, that I quote from the English common prayer book, and not from the Bible translation. The last has it, 'that this and that man was born there' [Ps 87:5]—meaning Tom, Dick and Harry, I suppose; a translation extremely worthy the solemnity of the prophecy! The difficulty lies in this. The Hebrew superlative is a repetition of the word—as '*this, this* man was born there:' but in this text the Hebrew copulative conjunction intervenes, so as to read 'this and this.' Now let us try if Horne Tooke will clear the way for us. The copulative, he says, simple means *add*: and if in one language, it must in all. We will now read the text according to this scholium: '*This, add this* man,' this *added* man, 'shall be born in her.' so that the copula, far from weakening, is intensitive. The concluding sentence singularly confirms this construction: 'All my fresh springs shall be in Thee.' The Bible translation leaves out fresh; but it is of no importance: for the plural shews, that he expected more than one spring to break out from him. The 87th psalm pursues the subject throughout.

The flight of the Church into the wilderness in Revelations [Ch.12] is also pregnant with America. The last verse, however, of the preceding chapter, viz. 'I stood on the sands of the sea,' should have began that Chapter; and then the flight of the woman would have been seen as crossing the sea.

Wm. Gilbert.

Augusta, March 3.

Gilbert's Masonic Oration has yet (19 Jan 2019) to be discovered. But we can marvel at a man who oversees the printing of the last sheet of his final publication a few hours before his death, as if he had astrologically calculated the exact time it would happen. Although the 'Oration' originated in 1806, Gilbert is likely to have added or amended material, in much the same way as he did for his ['Explanation of the Number 666'](#), which he claimed to have written three years previously. W.J. Hobby, the editor of the *Augusta Chronicle*, proprietor of the Augusta Bookstore, and Gilbert's last publisher, added the note about his death (within square brackets which are present in the original).

***Augusta Chronicle*, 3 July 1824**

Just Published,
And for sale at the Augusta Bookstore,
A MASONIC ORATION

Delivered in Columbia, S. C. on St. John Baptist's Day, 1806—by WILLIAM GILBERT, of Antigua.

[In addition to the obituary notice this day published, we would add, that in the forenoon of the 30th June, Mr Gilbert called at the Bookstore on the subject of his Oration, the last half sheet of which was then on the press. He had concluded to publish 'The Hurricane,' poem separately, with some new, in addition to the old, Notes—In the afternoon of that day, he had passed beyond the reach of the storms, tempests and hurricanes of the present life, leaving the Masonic Oration as the last efforts of a mind somewhat eccentric but of no ordinary cast. His friends can now preserve it as a memorial of a worthy man, long known in this community.]

Gilbert's obituary was reprinted in the *Augusta Chronicle* from the *Augusta Constitutionalist*. Patricia Cline Cohen writes: 'The editor of the *Constitutionalist*, who almost certainly prepared the obit, was Philip C. Guieu. He was once an editor of a paper in Washington, GA, a town 40 or 50 miles northwest of Augusta and one that was an early state capital in the late 18th century with some claim to being a literary place, with the family name Gilbert appearing in a list of cultured inhabitants remembered by a boy who grew up there. Guieu moved to Augusta around 1820-22.'

***Augusta Chronicle*, 3 July 1824**

Died, suddenly, on Wednesday last, WILLIAM GILBERT, Esq. a native of Antigua, and a resident of this city since the year 1810. This gentleman was the descendant of a most respectable family, held a commission in the British Navy in the Revolutionary War, and afterwards returned to his native Island, where he was admitted to the Bar and elected the Clerk of the Legislature of Antigua. This appointment and a profession that promised to be profitable, were abandoned at the claims of private friendship, and Mr. Gilbert went to England as the friend and principal witness of a gentleman of the army, who was to be tried by a Court Martial. His evidence upon the trial is said to have been remarkable for its clearness, intelligence and impartiality, and gained him many friends. He afterwards pursued the study of the Law at the Temple and became known to many distinguished literary persons; but disgusted with the politics of the English Government, he determined to pass the remainder of his days in America. He arrived at Charleston and lived for several years in Carolina, where, as afterwards, in Georgia, he was esteemed for his urbanity, integrity and benevolence. Mr. Gilbert was the author of many essays moral and political, of one or two dramatic pieces which remain unpublished, and of a poem called the Hurricane, which was about to be issued from the American press at the time of his death.—*Constitut*