

WORCESTERSHIRE MASONIC STUDY CIRCLE.

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at Kings Heath - April 27th 1959.

RITUALS AND THEIR DIFFERENT WORKINGS

We all know there are several Masonic Rituals in use in this Country today, separate from those used in other parts of the world.

¶ Before dealing with the details of the Ritual as now practised it is desirable to remind you of the main facts concerning its history at the period of the Union and during the years that have elapsed since. We have little definite knowledge of Rituals prior to the Union, but it would appear that about the 1760's the actual Ceremonies were brief. By the end of the century, however, the Ceremonial Ritual had become much better ordered and more formalised.

The different Rituals with their many variations may at times be somewhat confusing especially to the younger Freemasons, yet their differences make our Ceremonies and Meetings all the more interesting. Who is to say which one is correct?

Many Masonic writers and critics still argue that Emulation is the original working because it was first introduced as Perfect Ceremonies. What was the "Union"? It was the coming together of the two rival Grand Lodges, "The Moderns" and the "Antients". Strange as it may sound "The Moderns" came before the "Antients" and were the original Grand Lodge formed in the year 1717. The "Antients" formed afterwards in the year 1751. These two Grand Lodges split English Freemasonry in the second half of the 18th Century. By the end of the 18th Century these two rival Grand Lodges were still causing great trouble throughout the world. The rituals and their customs scarcely differed from those of their Irish and Scottish brethren whose Grand Lodges came to recognise the Antients as the Grand Lodge of England. These Antients were also known as "Athol" Masons. Seeing that the Antients Grand Lodge did not come into existence until over 30 years after the formation of its rival body the terms are to say the least misleading.

The Union was consummated on December 27th 1813, and the Lodge of Reconciliation was formed composed of representatives of the two previously rival bodies ostensibly to draw up and promulgate a ritual that would be acceptable to both parties. Many of our Brethren are imbued with the idea that our ritual in its present form originated with the Lodge of Reconciliation. Nothing is further from the truth. Each of these Grand Lodges had their own ritual or manuscript and each Grand Lodge forbade intervisitation. This command was by no means universally observed and entire Lodges occasionally changed their obedience.

The first step towards Union was taken by the "Antients" who appointed a Committee in 1797 to effect with one from the "Moderns" a scheme of Union. This proved negative and in the year 1809 the "Moderns" in their turn enjoined the several Lodges to revert to the ancient landmarks of the order, forming six months later the Lodge of Promulgation which recommended the changes necessary for the purpose. Among the many points dealt with were the Ceremonies of opening and closing in the several Degrees. The "Moderns" formularies for these were very crude and rudimentary while those of the Antients had attained a much higher degree of development. With the "Moderns" both Wardens sat in the West. The office of Inner Guard was first mentioned in the list of officers in some Minutes on August 23rd 1814, and afterwards the office was filled at all subsequent Meetings.

During its two years existence the Lodge of Promulgation performed very valuable work. For instance, the Office of Deacon was recommended. This office was practically unknown with the "Moderns". It was also resolved that the Ceremony of Installation of Masters of Lodges was one of the "true" land-marks of the Order and ought to be observed. Later the Members of this Lodge became the negotiating Committee which arranged the actual Union with the "Antients". I should mention that the Duke of Sussex, of the Lodge of Antiquity, was one of the Worshipful Masters of this Lodge of Promulgation. He afterwards became the Most Worshipful Grand Master and he was one who signed the articles of Union in the year 1813. When Promulgation had completed its work the Grand Lodge of the Moderns ordered all its subordinate Lodges to adopt the alterations and visits to all parts of the country were arranged to teach these agreed changes to the Provincial Lodges.

It is from this period Rituals became established and accepted which enabled ceremonies to be performed to a set wording. Up to this period the actual ceremonies were very short and brief. The position today is that notwithstanding many local variations in essentials - variations that it is hoped will always be carefully preserved - yet not one can say who or which is right. Some of the relics of pre-Union practice are still to be met with; for instance, the writing vest in Bristol and certain Cheshire Lodges. The circle of swords in Bristol. The wearing of a hat by the Master in the Newstead Lodge, Nottingham.

It must not be forgotten that some Lodges in various parts of the country, apparently not realising how little the formalities that had taken place in London really affected them and resenting alterations in the working that they thought were being unduly forced on them, stood aloof from the new Grand Lodge. But after a short time most of them fell into line.

Shortly after the lapse of the Lodge of Reconciliation two Lodges of Instruction were started which soon came to be regarded as the two principal Lodges of Instruction in London and who are still in being. The first of these was sanctioned in the year 1817 by the Lodge of Stability. The second was to give it its full designation - The Emulation Lodge of Improvement for Master Masons Lodge of Instruction, which popularly is, and will always be known as "Emulation". It was sanctioned in 1825 by the Lodge of Hope. Although these Lodges of Instruction were in being it must not be forgotten that even at this period manuscript notes of the working were made and were passed on from one Master to another. They had the effect of stabilising the ritual in these Lodges so that some of their special characteristics were preserved. It may be the Bristol Ritual which has never been printed, but is still preserved in manuscript was so established at an early date, but no one seems to know when it was first written down. The fact that Emulation meets at Headquarters in London tends to give it some authority. But it must be remembered that it has no special position nor any official recognition or approval. Its Members have no right to attempt to impose their own peculiarities of working on any Regular Lodge of Instruction set up to-day.

And now Brethren we come to the various workings or Rituals which many of us know exist. There is Unanimity, Bristol, Oxford, Stability, The Exeter Ritual, Britannia, Humber and of course "Perfect Ceremonies" which claims to be Emulation. Added to these, of course, are the Irish, Scottish, Netherland and many others even in Lancashire and Yorkshire, Logic Work, Taylors Working, Universal Working, London West End Working and of the latest the "Nigerian Ritual". Now let us consider some of these Rituals and whether their differences have any influence on the younger Freemasons.

Take the Unanimity first This is a ritual belonging to the Lodge of Unanimity No.102 North Walsham. It was written in 1838 by the then Secretary and was copied by him from an early Manuscript This ritual cannot be regarded as of earlier date than 1838. It was printed by the Lodge in 1907. This old established Lodge has preserved certain old fashioned ways of working that give it a character of its own which it would be a pity to disturb for the sake

of an ideal and impossible uniformity. So long as the real landmarks are preserved the retention of these peculiarities is much to be commended as evidence of what the working of our Craft was in days gone by.

The Bristol Working This is probably the oldest that survives in this country. While it conforms in all essentials with what was approved in 1816, it retains certain incidents of pre-Union working such as the circle of swords and the writing test which have now generally been dropped though one or more of them are still met with in individual Lodges in various localities. In many ways the Bristol working of the Third Degree is more dramatic than is the usual present day practice. The Ritual has never been printed but manuscript copies are obtainable by Brethren who desire them.

The Oxford Ritual is in no way connected with the Apollo University Lodge. In this Ritual it may be noted that the investiture address by the Senior Warden in the First Degree and the explanation of the working tools of the Second Degree are given in full instead of the curtailed forms which are used in the present day Emulation working. The Ritual is used in most of the Lodges of the province and by some Lodges in the adjoining Provinces as well as very generally in South Wales.

The Humber Working is the one in use by the Humber Lodge No. 57 meeting in Hull. Although not printed until 1922 it claims to be the ritual exercised in that Lodge for over a hundred years. It is based largely on the manuscript notes of the middle of the last century. In many of its phrases and expressions there is a similarity to those of the Bristol Ritual.

The Stability Working This was not printed until 1902 having been handed down since the Union by purely oral transmission. It is worked chiefly in many of the London Lodges and is sometimes called the Metropolitan working.

The Exeter Ritual The chief interest in this book lies in the fact that it is the only one that contains the full opening and closing of the Board of Installed Masters which had been for long handed down orally in the St. John the Baptist Lodge No. 39 Exeter. It was in this Lodge that the trouble first arose which caused Grand Lodge to issue the instruction which we now read before proceeding with this old working of the Board of Installed Masters. As the Past Masters present are well acquainted with the fact that in some of the Worcestershire Lodges the full working of the Board of Installed Masters is now being performed. In some ways it may generally be regretted that this form of opening and closing a board of Installed Masters has now fallen into disuse. It is over 150 years since it was generally used perhaps in a little different way to the one in use today. It is more common in some of the Northern and Western Provinces than in the neighbourhood of the Metropolis, but an increasing number of Lodges now, again, practice it. Some years ago certain Emulation fanatics attempted to take out that it was irregular and even induced two Grand Secretaries to issue a circular letter to that effect. The matter came to a head in 1926 when it was brought before the Board of General Purposes in an endeavour to have it officially forbidden. As a result of this investigation and discussion and the production of evidence of a continuous use of over 150 years, it was eventually decreed by Grand Lodge on December 1st 1926 that any Lodge that cared may practice the ceremonies provided only that it was made clear by the Installing Master that no further degree in Freemasonry was being conferred. To many Installed Masters present the rest of this history is well known as they hear it whenever present at an Installation Meeting where this old working is performed.

The Perfect Ceremonies of Craft Masonry as taught and practiced in the Lodge of Emulation. This ritual which claims to give Emulation working was first issued in the year 1816. There are many other rituals in use today some are indeed very interesting and might be commented on very freely but again I say - Who is to say which one is correct? Many old Lodges have traditional usages and would rather surrender their Warrants than give these ancient customs up. We must

admit that it adds greatly to the pleasure and interest of visiting that there is no dead uniformity of working all over the country. As long as the essentials remain the same no one can complain. Now Brethren, I wish to give you a few of these differences and variations in our Rituals which I am quite sure will interest you and probably have your comments always remembering that some of these words are written or printed in full in one ritual and only indicated by letter in another.

I will start these variations in the "First Degree" and leave them for your comments later. The Candidate on being announced by the I.G. the Worshipful Master enquires - How does he hope to obtain these privileges. In another ritual - How does he hope to gain these privileges. Again, in order to secure those privileges. In order to retain those privileges etc. We find in the Charge by the Worshipful Master while the Candidate is in the N.E. corner of the Lodge - not the N.E. part of the Lodge - that he says, This is done to awaken the feelings of every new made brother, in another ritual it is to arouse the feelings of every new made brother. The candidate later admits he was divested of all Metals, in another ritual he admits he was deprived of all money and metallic substance and again he was deprived of everything valuable etc. This latter statement is not entirely correct, as the clothes he is wearing are of some value. This trial was done for "Three Special Reasons" or for Three Especial Reasons. Then following in the Charge we say having subsisted, of having existed again having survived. No more solid foundation. No more stolid foundation. Monarchs themselves have been promoters of the Art, have patronised our mysteries. Have participated in our mysteries. The late King George VI certainly participated in our functions and here we must agree that participated is the better word than patronised. Then we come to your lawful undertakings. In every emergency or in every extremity. To exert those talents to exercise those talents. To enable you to be respectable in life, and lastly in the First Degree to indelibly imprint etc. and inevitably to imprint etc.

Second Degree In the opening prayer we have the rays of heaven may shed their influence. Here again we have their benign influence. Here again the Candidate says he was divested of metal or he was deprived of everything valuable previously to entering the Lodge. The benefit of a pas word. The benefit of a passing word. You are now in the midway. You are now in the middle. The hailing sign or sign of prayer or sign of perseverance. To adjust all rectangular corners of buildings, to adjust all irregular corners of buildings.

Third Degree To succour his weaknesses to succour his distresses. I will not injure him myself, I will not revile him - even by this glimmering ray, even by this feeble ray. The Menatschin or Prefects, the Masters or Presidents O Wonderful Masons, O Worthy Masons.

You will notice Brethren that where these words differ their first letters are usually the same which clearly shows they have only been printed in the early rituals or manuscript by "letter" and so translated according to mind or interpretation. For example, Menatschin or Prefects, the Masters or Presidents, O Wonderful Masons O Worthy Masons, and so we can go along selecting these differences.

And so to end this paper let us always remember that many of these words may be changed, yet providing they have similar meaning or interpretation why should we comment or "butt in" during our ceremonies. Let us remember that memory is not everything in Freemasonry.