



Notes from a Preceptor's Handbook

A Preceptor:

(OED) 1440 A.D. from Latin *praeceptor*

one who instructs, a teacher, a tutor, a mentor

Emulation

Our ritual.....



"Never mind the Ritual Book. We'll do it our way"

'Why Emulation?'

When giving an introductory talk about our ritual I have tended to say that the Founders of my Lodge chose the '**Emulation**' working in 1946 and this has remained our standard ever since. (Strictly speaking this is not quite true. No book of Emulation ritual was printed until 1969.) As I write I have open in front of me the Masonic Ritual book presented to our first Initiate on his being Raised to the Third Degree on 9th April 1947. On the title page it says simply '**The Perfect Ceremony** of Craft Masonry' but then adds, significantly, '*for Emulation Workers*'. What other options might the Founders have then had?

May we go back to first principles? 'The United Grand Lodge of England has stated: (It) *does not publish nor does it give its authorisation to any specific form of ritual, either written, printed or spoken.*' The Book of Constitutions Rule 155 adds: '*The members present at any Lodge...have an undoubted right to regulate their own proceedings...if consistent with...the Craft.*'

To the question '*Is a Master entitled to decide what ritual should be practised during his year?*' the Board of General Purposes simply responded that: *Rule 155 lays down that the majority of the Lodge should regulate the proceedings*'

It would seem reasonably clear then that a majority of Lodge members is necessary to select or change the preferred form of ritual. It therefore follows that an ambitious Master (or his D.C.) cannot alter the ritual of a Lodge (or its procedures) on a personal whim without first seeking agreement from the Lodge members.

It was therefore the duty of the Founding Members of my Lodge – not UGLE nor the PrGM - to recommend a ritual for their members to approve from the variety then available to them: *Emulation, Perfect, Stability, Bristol, Oxford, Humber, Taylor's, Universal, West End, Nigerian*, etc. are perhaps the best known but there were and still are many others. It follows that before 1969 Founders opting for Emulation were wise to select a version of Emulation in printed form, e.g. Nigerian or Perfect.

Over half the Lodges under the English Constitution and many overseas Constitutions have chosen Emulation as the basis of their rituals. We might ask what might be the justification for Emulation to assume pre-eminence? In brief 'Emulation' has authority, authenticity and continuity as is shown by its history.

History

When the Antient and Modern Grand Lodges united on 27th December 1813 a Lodge of Reconciliation was set up to create a common ritual from the multiplicity of workings associated with the two separate traditions. After approval in 1816 of the three recommended Degree ceremonies by a specially convened Grand Lodge the Lodge of Reconciliation's task was complete.

The Emulation Lodge of Improvement was formed on 2nd October 1823 with many members of the Lodge of Reconciliation amongst its membership. Its role was simple – to train and encourage the preceptors (there were then no DCs!) of the lodges of instruction or 'improvement' by selecting the Reconciliation working (to become known as 'Emulation') as a standard within the English Constitution. The Lodge of Emulation's abiding ethos was '*checking the passing error lest it should pass into common currency*'. This still remains an important role of both lodge Preceptor and DC even today.

From time to time requests have been made to bring the Emulation ritual 'up to date' to reflect the changing social scene. The Committee of the Lodge of Emulation took the position that as Grand Lodge had viewed and approved all three ceremonies in 1816 it was not for a subordinate body to make changes without prior approval

from Grand Lodge. The Board of General Purposes has been very sparing of any alteration over the past 150 years. It follows that if a Lodge is 'working Emulation' then it has no mandate to make any change whatsoever – unless the physical dimensions of the lodge room make the rubric impracticable.

Virtually the only change in the ritual wording since 1816 has been the perhaps socially desirable one of softening the various blood-curdling penalty clauses. Changes to the words and rubric have been tightly controlled throughout those years by the Emulation Lodge Committee.

To mirror operative practise the Emulation Lodge of Improvement established a tradition of relying solely on memory for its ritual and so for 150 years or so it never permitted a printed format. As we saw the first Emulation ritual book as such was not published until as recently as 1969.

However, Provincial lodges unable to match Emulation's practice of weekly meetings to rehearse the three Degrees required some additional form of printed assistance based on, even if not authorised by, the oral Emulation ritual.

Amongst the earliest available printed variants were, for example, a (very popular) 'Exposure' printed by Richard Carlile in 1825; a more reliable oral transcription by an Emulation member, George Claret, in 1838; the 'Nigerian' with admirably full red rubric or 'stage directions' for isolated colonial lodges; and the 'Perfect' which was comprehensive, embodying not only the Emulation ritual but also the traditional songs, Addresses and Lectures.

A question I am often asked is -Do we work true Emulation in the Wiltshire lodges adopting it? Yes, of course – as closely as we can. What changes have we allowed to creep in? There is perhaps little or none in the wording. However because of the floor dimensions of the various Temples and the increasing emphasis on 'Retention through participation' much working is shared and corresponding changes to the ritual book's 'red rubric' have occurred.

Let me summarise them:

The Emulation Lodge of Improvement assumes that the Chair will be occupied by just one Installed Master throughout the ceremony and that he will conduct it *in its entirety*. There is *no* delegation of Tracing Boards, of Working Tools, of Charges etc.

While 'Emulation' permitted the Master's work to be delegated to other *PMs and the Wardens*, in pursuit of wider 'ownership' of the ceremonies the Master's work is now often delegated to other MMs.

For consistency one slight change is often made after the Obligation. The printed ritual requires the Sn. to be cut and Deacons to lower their wands on completion of the WM's words. However the penal sign is widely held until the VSL has actually been sealed with a ks. as it is only then that a serious promise has become a SO.

The office of Director of Ceremonies is not to be found in Emulation working. Such an office did not exist in 1813 and when assistance was helpful a senior Past Master undertook the appropriate duties.

Silver Matchbox

The words '*Silver Matchbox*' when working Emulation are sometimes whispered in awe. This is a reference to the pleasing custom in the Emulation Lodge of Improvement of presenting an engraved Silver Matchbox Cover to any Past Master who completes from the WM's Chair *an entire ceremony* faultlessly in both word and action. I emphasise, *the entire ceremony has to be faultless without a single prompt*. In its first 150 years, 345 members of the Emulation Lol have received a Silver Matchbox for working a chosen Degree error free. I write with near

incredulity that 145 of them have also met the far more daunting task *in all three Degrees*. In fairness, lest our Wiltshire Masons are acquiring dry throats and weak knees at the very thought, the Emulation LoI does meet *weekly* in London throughout eight months of the year. One can learn fast in that competitive environment!

Afterthoughts

'Emulation' in Wiltshire? It is pleasing to say that it is still going strong. Should any Mason be tempted to question the effort involved in trying to learn the ritual with accuracy let us remember that it is a very direct and meaningful link with the Masons of 200 years ago who also had to learn these very same words and work these very same ceremonies – *without* the benefit of 'a little blue book!' For some this goal may not be achievable – but we must always do our very best.

With this 200 year history behind us , working 'Emulation' becomes a great privilege and a continuing honour. Let us rise to that challenge!

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