



Notes from a Preceptor's Handbook

A Preceptor:

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

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

**'I invest you
with the
Jewel - Insignia
Badge of your
Office'**

Does it matter which?

I invest you with

The Installation had gone well. Charlie this time had not merely watched the show but listened attentively to the script. It would not be too long before he would be centre stage himself and realised he had a lot to learn. Long ago he had noted that the obligations in the three Degrees while apparently similar were actually confusingly different. Tonight he recognised for the first time that different words were being used during the appointment of Lodge officers to describe the collar and its jewel - but why? He decided to ask his old friend and mentor, Fred, when they slipped into their watering hole for a quiet half on the way home.

The first sip had hardly touched the spot before Charlie burst through their usual banter with his poser: *'Fred, why are the Senior Warden and Treasurer invested with the 'insignia' of their office when everyone else is invested with just a 'jewel.' Does the use of 'insignia' therefore denote the high importance of those Offices while 'jewel' is used for lesser appointments?*

Fred mused long and hard before replying. *'I don't think that argument holds water, Charlie. In the Emulation ritual the IPM, although not an officer, carries great responsibility and the Chaplain, who is the most senior of all Lodge offices, are both invested with a Jewel. Other rituals, say the 'Revised and Perfect,' use 'jewel' throughout. Our Constitutions also refer to any object hanging from a collar, sash or ribbon as a 'jewel' so the 'Revised and Perfect' have got it about right. I suggest we may need to look elsewhere for an answer.'*

He continued: *'But Charlie, does it actually matter? It's really just a matter of personal vanity if we try to impress our colleagues with our 'blotting paper' memory of the printed page. The object of the exercise really isn't to impress our mates but to communicate the Masonic meaning of a passage to the Candidate, full stop. So, if we have taken the trouble to truly understand the meaning it shouldn't matter a jot whether we say jewel, badge, insignia or mix up any other words, just so long as the chap we are addressing gets the message.'*

Charlie broke in. *'But doesn't Grand Lodge want us to stick to its rules?'*

'Yes, of course, but ritual is different; it isn't one of those rules. UGLE understood all this very well nearly 200 years ago. In 1815 a Lodge of Reconciliation had tried to reconcile the wide variety of rituals into one standard form. With lodges coming together from the Antient tradition and the Moderns there was bound to be a wide variety of ceremonials, all well intentioned. UGLE decided then and there not to give authority 'to any man or body of men' to promulgate a ritual which the whole of the Masonic fraternity would be expected to follow. They saw there was a richness, a

vitality, in Lodges following their own traditions.' Had they then wanted uniformity they could have said so.

Charlie thought about this a moment: *'Why then did the Emulation ritual ever arise?'*

'Think about it, Charlie. Existing lodges already had a tradition. What about the new lodges being formed.? What ritual could they follow? After the Lodge of Reconciliation was disbanded in 1815, eight years later in October 1823 many of its members were asked to form a Lodge of Emulation to resolve the matter. Their aim was to suggest a common English ritual to serve in the future as a guide for masons, not as a straight-jacket. Keeping close to former 'operative' practise, 'Emulation' members learnt their ritual without any printed aid, by observation and (frequent) repetition. Their ritual was in fact only printed as recently as October 1969, 150 years later. Society had changed. Most masons no longer had the time or opportunity to learn all the words perfectly and parrot fashion. A book of words had become essential. In the meantime many other rituals had been devised and printed to suit local needs and most still exist today.'

'Shouldn't we all try to follow the Emulation example though? It has a sort of Grand Lodge approval', Charlie queried.

'Do you remember your Second Degree?', Fred mused. 'The Candidate is told that "Freemasonry is a progressive science'. Surely progress must involve some change from the status quo? We have seen how UGLE deleted some blood-curdling phrases from the First Obligation that they felt jarring to the prevailing mood. Emulation was printed for the reasons mentioned above. In our own Lodge, the Deacons drop their wands after the Candidate has sealed it on the VSL, not before. None of this affects the meaning of it all. It simply makes the ceremony more logical, more acceptable, for a newer generation of Lodge members, that's all.'

Charlie protested: *'You make it seem that all our old traditions can be changed by a contemporary whim and so we are free to discard anything the Lodge Founders respected.'*

'Far from it, Charlie. Do you remember when the Master Elect faces the Secretary's table at his Installation and assents to all the Antient Charges. The sixth one is important. He affirms he will submit to all the Resolutions of his Brethren... consistent of course with the our Constitutions. No Master is free to make changes for changes sake and any alteration he believes might be helpful must first obtain the agreement of all lodge members.'

So there you have it, Charlie. If you have changed the odd word in the ritual to keep your flow going so the Candidate understands you better, then don't worry. We all do it. But should you or your Past Masters ever be minded to change the traditions of your Lodge then be very cautious. Ensure that these are discussed and approved by all of the Lodge members first. Remember, as Master you are charged with ensuring their happiness. They do own the Lodge just as much as you.

Michael Lee

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Province of Wiltshire

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