



LODGE VEGAS # 32

DUE GUARD

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IT IS OFTEN noted that Masonic writers hesitate to offer any explanation of the term "due guard," averring that it is merely a form of words which was once in use, but is now grown obsolete, as if that were genuine explanation. Scholars should not close the book of interpretation merely because a thing has fallen out of use. Mackey's Encyclopedia, so it seems, has dropped into this error. On page 222 of the first volume of that useful compendium we read that "Due Guard" is a mode of recognition which derives its name from its object, which is to "duly guard" the person using it in reference to his obligation. Dr. Mackey then goes on to say that this term is "an Americanism" and therefore of recent origin, though he refers to a ritual of 1757 in which it is used.

Now there is reason to believe that "due guard" goes back to a time long prior to 1757, or to 1727, or to 1717, and that it came very reasonably from a phrase which was once the name of a town, whereby hangs a long tale, too long for the telling here, though it may be attempted at a later date.

Those who have read aught of the history of book-and paper-making know that these two trades were in the very van of those enlightened ones who led that great movement against the papacy, and all connoted thereby, which resulted at last in the Reformation and the Renaissance. Now it happens, as has been shown conclusively by various scholars working as specialists in this field, that these "Reformers before the Reformation" had to work in secret, and by means of signs and watchwords, lest they be detected by the authorities and therefrom suffer grievous evils.

Always there was a movement against the seven tyrannies of Rome but it was not until the beginning of the thirteenth century that this movement assumed such formidable movements as led the Holy Father to send out Bulls of destruction, which Bulls and their carrying out, left on the pages of history the reddest and angriest scars that Clio has to look upon.

Those who wrote books, those who printed books, and those who manufactured the paper and binding of these books, were naturally in the closest federation so far as all intellectual aims were concerned, and the members of these allied trades, so it may be safely said, formed a kind of great unorganized fraternity which worked underground in behalf of enlightenment. The paper-makers were in the habit of watermarking their stock with emblematic devices which were understood by the initiated; and the printers used for head-pieces and tail-pieces, and for initial ornaments, such cunning figures as, to those on the inside, meant very much; and the authors themselves, by a clever use of capital letters and such makeshifts, were able to flash to the scattered friends of Learning that they had many brethren here and there though they might know it not. A watermark was very often a call across the dark by one brother to another in order to carry a word of hope, recognition, and encouragement.

Now it happens that one of the towns at the very centre of the French paper-making trade was called "Dieu le garde," which, in our more familiar speech, connotes "God Guard It." In after years usage changed the name to various forms, such as Dulegard, Daulegard, etc., but it is evident that the French of that community never forgot the origin of the unusual name.

What more natural thing than that the Albigensian paper-makers should hit upon this name of one of their towns as an excellent device to use in their water-marks! Many such watermarks exist. One of them, a copy of which lies before me as I write, carries an elaborate symbolism in which one may detect the emblems of Light, of Brotherly Love, of the Bright and Morning Star, of the Spirit of Truth, etc., with a band across the bottom in which are the letters that spell "Daulegard."

But what has this to do with Freemasonry? This, that it seems very reasonable to suppose that among the various institutions the members of which in those days had completely outgrown the puerile superstitions enforced by the papacy must have been the Masonic lodges. I believe that this will some day be proved by documentary evidence. I am convinced myself that others of the fraternities existing in secret at that time, such as the various schools of the Alchemists, and, later, the Rosicrucians, had some connections with the Masonic Fraternity, and left in its symbolism certain emblems and ideas of their own. In other words, Freemasonry in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries was one of many secret fraternities the members of which were devoted to a campaign of enlightenment (which in those days meant anti-Rome) and it therefore fell heir to a whole stream of occult and symbolical lore which was devised to meet the situation at the time, which situation was that men could not, except at the peril of their lives, speak in public what every man of intelligence knew in his private mind.

Among these devices, symbols, or emblems thus inherited was this favourite paper-maker's device, "Dieu le garde," "God Guard It." This hypothesis seems reasonable to me; it has a host of facts behind it; and it gives to the expression as we have it a meaning and some significance, a thing that cannot be said of the Mackey hypothesis that "Due Guard" means to "guard duly."

- Source: The Builder - January 1922

DUE FORM

All ritual is fortifying. Ritual is a natural necessity for mankind. The more things are upset, the more they fly to it. I abhor slovenly ritual anywhere. By the way, would you mind assisting at the examinations, if there are many visiting Brothers tonight? "You'll find some of 'em very rusty but - it's the Spirit, not the Letter, that giveth life. The question of visiting Brethren is an important one. There are so many of them in London now, you see; and so few places where they can meet."

So we read in the greatest of all Masonic stories, "In the Interests of the Brethren," by Rudyard Kipling. It is a vivid picture of how our gentle Craft helped its wounded members in the days of the Great War, dark, dreadful and confused. No Mason can read it aloud; a lump will climb into his throat and choke him.

It tells of a Lodge of Instruction, formed by the Lodge of Faith and Works, No. 5837, for the benefit of wounded Brethren, under the guise of giving them a chance to rub up on the Ritual. The scene when the Lodge was called up at the sound of the Gavel; the rattle of crutches, the shuffle of

feet - some with one leg, some with one hand - is a picture to break the heart, and mend it. The Signs were fearfully and wonderfully made!

"D'you like it?" said the Doctor to a one-footed Brother, as they sat together, after the Lodge had been seated with difficulty. "Do I? It's Heaven to me, sittin' in Lodge again. It's all comin' back now, watching their mistakes. I haven't much religion, but all I had I learnt in Lodge," he said with flushed face.

"Yes," he went on, "Veiled in all'gory and illustrated in symbols - the Fatherhood of God an' the Brotherhood of Man; an' what more in Hell do you want. Look at 'em!" he broke off, giggling. "See! See!" cried the one-footed Corporal. "I could ha' done it better myself - my one foot in France. Yes, I should think they ought to do it again!"

Yet, in the midst of all the tragic confusion, the Master insisted that the Ritual be followed as nearly letter-perfect as possible; as had been the manner of Masonry from the first. In the Constitutions of 1738 we learn that Grand Lodge may be opened in Form, in Due Form and in Ample Form; all alike valid and with the same authority. When opened by any other Officer than the Grand Master, the Grand Lodge is opened only in "Form." If a Past Grand Master, or the Deputy Grand Master presides, it is opened in "Due Form." When the Grand Master himself is in the Chair, the grand Lodge is opened in "Ample Form." And the same is true, with but slight variations, on this side of the sea.

Why does Masonry insist so strictly upon exactness in its Ritual? There is a profound reason, not to be forgotten or ignored. True, it is the Spirit, not the Letter, that giveth life; but the Letter does give a Body, without which the Spirit of Masonry would be a formless blur, losing much of its meaning, if not all of its beauty. Ceremony keeps things up; without form the spirit melts into thin air and is lost.

What is true of Masonry is equally true of religion, of manners and of art. The Poet Tennyson speaks of those, "whose faith hath center everywhere, nor cares to fix itself in form." That is, they believe in everything in general and nothing in particular. Their faith is like the earth in the story of creation, as the Bible tells it, "without form and void;" a vague sentiment, as flimsy as a mist and as frail.

Manners, it has been said, are minor morals. That is, they are forms of a social ritual in which the spirit of courtesy and amenity finds expression. So essential are they as a form of social fellowship, that, as Emerson said, if they were lost, some gentlemen would be obliged to re-invent such a code. The phrase, "It is not done," has more than mere convention behind it. It bespeaks a standard, a sense of propriety, a fineness of feeling, a respect for the rights and feelings of others.

Some of our modern artists are trying to throw off the old classic forms of music, painting and poetry. The result is chaos, a formless riot of color and sound, in which a horse may be green and a song a mere mob of notes, without melody. Without lovely form the spirit of beauty fades and is lost. Ages of experience have wrought out noble forms of art and life, which we cannot defy or ignore without disaster.

The same is true of Masonry. Gentle, wise, mellow with age; its gracious spirit has fashioned a form, or body, or an art; if we call it so, in which its peculiar genius finds expression. Its old and lovely ritual, if rightly used, evokes the Spirit of Masonry, as each of us can testify. The mere opening of a Lodge creates a Masonic atmosphere in which the truths of Masonry seem more real and true. It weaves a spell about us, making fellowship gracious. It is a mystery; we love it, without caring to analyze it.

By the same token, if the rhythm of the ritual is bungled, or slurred, or dealt with hastily or without dignity; its beauty is marred and its spell broken. Just imagine the opening of Lodge, or any one of the Degrees, jazzed up, rushed through with, and how horrible it would be. The soul of Masonry would be sacrificed, and its spirit evaporated. For that reason we cannot take too much pains in giving the ritual such a rendering as befits its dignity, its solemnity and its haunting beauty.

No wonder Masonry is jealous of its ceremonies and symbols. It hesitates to make the slightest change, even when errors have crept into the ritual, lest something precious is lost. Indeed, it is always seeking "that which is lost," not alone in its great Secret, but in all its symbols which enshrine a wisdom gray with age, often but dimly seen, and sorely needed in the hurry and medley of our giddy-paced age.

Mere formalism is always a danger. Even a lofty ritual may become a rigmarole, a thing of rut and rote. Sublime truths may be repeated like a parrot, as the creed in a church may be recited without thought or feeling, by force of habit. Still, such a habit is worth keeping, and often the uttering of great words stirs the heart with a sense of the cargoes of wonder which they hold, for such as have ears to hear.

No matter; our fear of formalism - its mockery and unreality - must not blind us to the necessity of noble, stately and lovely form in which to utter and embody the truths that make us men. For that reason every part of the ritual ought to have Due Form, nothing skimped or performed perfunctorily, in order that the wise, good and beautiful truth of Masonry may have full expression and give us its full blessing. Only so can we get from it what it has to give us for our good.

Take, for example, the Opening of the Lodge, so often regarded as of no great importance in itself, save as a preliminary to what is to follow. Not so. Nothing in Masonry is more impressive, if we see it aright. As a flower "opens its Lodge," as one poet puts it, when it unfolds its petals and displays its center to the sun, which renews its life; so the opening of a Masonic Lodge is a symbol of the opening out of the human mind and heart to God. It is a drama of an inward and ineffable thing, not to be spoken of except in the poetry of symbol.

One sees more plainly in English ritual, in which the three Degrees, or grades as they name them, has each its stage. First is the stage appropriate to the Apprentice, a call to lift the mind above the level of external things. The second is a further opening, an advance in the science revealing greater things than Apprentices may know. It is an opening "upon the square," which the first Degree is not.

By the time we reach the Third Degree, a still deeper opening of the mind is implied, "upon the centre," for those of the Master rank, involving the use of finer powers of perception, to the very center and depths of being. How far and to what depth any of us is able to open the Lodge of his Mind, is the measure of what Masonry is to us. As an ancient manual of initiation tells us, urging us to an inward quest:

"There lives a Master in the hearts of men who makes their deeds, by subtle-pulling strings, dance to what time He will. With all thy soul trust Him, and take Him for thy succor. So shalt thou gain, by grace of Him, the uttermost repose, the Eternal Peace." Such meaning, and far more than here hinted, lie hidden to most of us in the simple ceremony of opening the Lodge. How much Masonry would mean for us and do for us, if only it had its due form both of ritual and interpretation. It might not explain all riddles, but it would light many a dark path, and lead us thither where we seek to go.

Religion, untainted, here dwells;
Here the morals of Athens are taught;

Great Hiram's tradition here tells How the world out of chaos was brought.

SO MOTE IT BE

- Source: Short Talk Bulletin - Feb. 1928
Masonic Service Association of North America

Prepare By, Br. Florian for the benefit of the Craft, DEC, 2012