The Precious Jewels

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THE Masonic usage of the word jewel has doubtless struck many a brother as not a little peculiar upon his first introduction to the traditional phraseology of the Craft. What is possibly its most familiar application, that of designating the badges of office used in the lodge, is however sufficiently in accord with the modern meaning of the word to make it appear plausible that it was through this that it came to be adopted into our terminology. These badges, worn on the breast and suspended by a ribbon or an ornamental chain, are frequently superb examples of the jewelers' art. It might thus seem not unnatural to suppose that plainer specimens were merely substitutes or imitations of such jewels, and that the other applications of the word in the rituals are derived from this by association, and as affording a secondary verbal symbolism indicating the value set by Masons upon certain emblems. There is no need to say any more of this, as like so many apparently obvious explanations, further examination shows it to be wide of the mark, for this use is not the primary one. But though secondary it is doubtless true that its accordance with the ordinary every-day meaning has had a great deal to do with the persistence of the word in Masonic forms. Such evidence as we have seems to indicate that it came into use by Freemasons a very long time ago and that it is possibly as old as anything in the system. At any rate it is pretty certain that it originally had nothing to do with ornamental badges of office.

THE MEANING OF THE WORD

A jewel to us signifies something precious; this in ordinary every-day usage seems to be the root idea, whether the value be intrinsic in the material or due to its beauty and workmanship. It is therefore with something like surprise that we learn that the word is really derived from the same root as the French word jeu, and that it meant originally a plaything, a toy or a trinket. So fully indeed did the word connote the idea of "play" in medieval times that in Flanders the dramatic performances presented by the Craft Gilds on the different festivals were actually called jewels. In Masonic usage, however, the idea of value seems to have always been the prominent one as far back as we can go. Whether the other was also present may be an interesting speculation. In most trades there are traditional jokes which through familiarity have become more habits of speech than occasions for laughter except when first communicated to the novice, That our old operative predecessors had a strong sense of humor is certain, and also that, like unsophisticated folk generally, they did not see anything inappropriate in mingling it with the sublime, or setting the comic side by side with the serious and sacred. Men who have the true craftsman's appreciation of, and interest in their work, are quick also to make fun of it on occasion, and it would be natural enough for them to speak of their most necessary implements and tools as "playthings." Such tricks of speech were to be heard among the elder workmen in different occupations within the memory of those still living, and may even yet survive if trades unionism, and the idea that work is essentially an evil to be reduced to an absolute minimum, have not quite killed them. The case of

one old rough mason, still alive some twenty years ago, might be quoted. It was his invariable habit to speak of any particularly awkward stone, either from its shape or size, as a "trinket," which seems a curiously apt parallel. No stress, however, is to be laid on this suggestion, only it may be as well to bear in mind that at the time the word was first employed Masonically it had other meanings in common use besides those to which it is now limited, and that such meanings may have been in the minds of the men who first spoke of the "jewels" of their Craft.

PRESENT MASONIC USAGE

Though, as we have noted, the first thought suggested to a Mason today by the word is that of the insignia of the officers of the lodge and the honorary badges given to past officers, yet he can hardly fail to be aware that it has other applications. In the Second Degree the candidate is told of the "three precious jewels of the Fellowcraft." In England the Entered Apprentice learns that "the perfect Ashlar is for the experienced Craftsman to try and adjust his jewels on." In America, from the time of Webb at least, the corresponding passage says that the same ashlar "is a stone made ready by the hands of the workman, to be adjusted by the working tools of the Fellowcraft." There is no doubt but that here tools are synonymous with jewels, but these jewels of the Fellowcraftsman are not the three mentioned above. The candidate is at the same time told of the furniture and the ornaments of the lodge. The former includes the Square, which is found in several of the sets of jewels hereafter quoted, while the latter may be derived from a tradition that had come to be misunderstood of an earlier set of jewels. That "jewel" and "ornament" have long been almost synonymous may have had something to do with the change in name.

There will be no need to remind the Mason who is in least familiar with the formularies of the Craft how confusingly these various groups overlap and interconnect. There is one external characteristic common to them all, with the exception of the first, and that is their arrangement in triplets. And even if the jewels of office are now more than three it must be remembered that originally the lodge had only this number of officers, the Master and the two Wardens, so that this set, too, originally agreed with the others in this regard. Indeed a purist in Masonic nomenclature would have good grounds for insisting that the insignia of the subordinate officers are not properly called jewels, and that the custom of doing so is due to ignorance and carelessness. This may well be, but of course such extensions of meaning by analogy and association are quite normal in the evolution of language; and something after all has to be conceded to convenience.

Let us now consider these various groups in more detail. The "furniture" consists, as is well known, of the Bible, the compasses and the square. It is probable that the term is derived from another statement, that a lodge must be furnished, that is provided with, these things as one of the conditions of regularity. The "ornaments" consist of the Mosaic Pavement, Indented Tessel and Blazing Star. We have already seen a possible connection between the terms ornament and jewel and will defer further discussion for the moment. **The "jewels" or "tools" of the Fellowcraft mentioned in the explanation usually**

given of the perfect ashlar, are the "square, level and plumb" which are also said (in America) to be the immovable jewels of the lodge, and are also actually the insignia of the three principal and original officers of the lodge. The movable jewels are the two ashlars and the trestleboard. It may be remarked here that except in the United States these last are called immovable and the others movable. There is also evidence to show that this is the original usage, and that the peculiar American description is due to a more or less deliberate change made by the Baltimore Convention in 184?. Finally we have the "precious jewels of the Fellowcraft," which phrase seems only to be used as a figurative mode of describing the traditional manner of conveying Masonic instruction and preserving Masonic secrets.

Taking for granted the now generally received hypothesis that Freemasonry two hundred years ago comprised only two grades or degrees, each with its appropriate ceremonies and ritual secrets, it is feasible to suggest tentatively that all these groups or sets of three are variants or doublets of some common original which was given as part of the instruction in the primitive "making" or initiation of the first grade, excepting those now said to belong especially to the Fellowcraft. These, as has been seen, stand quite apart from the others, and we shall therefore dismiss them for the present with the suggestion that they seem to be connected with the account of the five senses on the one hand, and the symbolic key of Masonry, which is enlarged upon in the first section of lecture in the Entered Apprentice Degree as usually worked in England. It would seem that they may have come to be termed jewels toward the end of the eighteenth century to signify their importance in the emblematic instructions regarding the basic duties and obligations incumbent upon each individual Mason.

THE JEWELS OF THE LODGE

In this, as in other special investigations of the kind, we are greatly handicapped by the lack of definite and trustworthy information; and for the earliest origins there is practically nothing outside the old Catechisms which have already been freely made use of in the previous articles in this series. As has been stated before, they are documents of very doubtful authenticity, but if we reject them on that account we have simply nothing at all to go upon. We must therefore use them for whatever they may be worth, always remembering that conclusions based upon them must always be held with a certain reserve.

Assuming then that these documents represent variant forms of the oral tradition of pre-Grand Lodge Masonry, or part of it, let us see what they have to tell us upon the subject. Eight of these catechisms have questions and answers relating to the jewels of Masonry or of the lodge, and of these four seem to agree that they were a square ashlar, a diamond and the common square; by which presumably we are to understand the working tool of that name. It is true that the Mason's Examination says that there are four, naming them as the "square, astler, diamond and common square," yet this is probably, indeed almost certainly, an error arising through the separation, by an inserted comma, of the adjective "square" from the substantive "astler," thus turning the original form, represented by the

other three versions, into a duplication of the common square. Unless indeed we suppose that the qualifying word "common" was later inserted in order to prevent the statement appearing utter nonsense, and to try and give some meaning to the double mention of the implement. But this appears the less likely hypothesis.

That the original number of jewels in this tradition was really three and not four is further supported by the fact that in the Mystery of Free Masons, which is obviously a slightly variant form of the Examination tradition, this answer has dropped out together with the following question, while the answer to the latter has taken its place. This will be made clear by placing them in parallel columns, as follows:

Examination

Q. How many precious jewels are there in Masonry?

A. Four, Square, Astler, Diamond and Common Square.

Q. How many lights be there in a lodge?

A. Three, the Master, Warden and Fellows.

Mystery

Q. How many precious jewels be there in Masonry?

A. --------

Q. --------

A. Three, the Master, Warden and Fellows.

All the other documents that mention the jewels follow it with a question about "lights" including Prichard's Dissection. Of the remainder several mention the lights in approximately the same relative position so that we may perhaps assume that in the originals of all these variants there were questions and answers respecting lights and jewels grouped together. From a number of considerations, such as the general use of the subjunctive mood instead of the indicative it would seem that the Mystery is probably somewhat the older form of the two, though both are certainly defective in that each contains matter that has dropped out of the other. It would be very easy, when two consecutive questions demand answers beginning with the word "three," and neither of them very intelligible as we may suppose to the copyists, that such a slip should be made, and once made, be perpetuated.

This, however, by the way. In three other forms we have agreement on the same sequence of questions about jewels and lights, though the defining phrases "in Masonry" and "in the lodge" are absent, probably marking an earlier stage in the tradition. These three form another well-defined group as they resemble each other even more closely than the two first quoted do. The answer to the question about jewels, with some variation in spelling, is in two of them as follows:

Q. How many jewels?

A. Three, a square asher, a diamond and a square.

The third has the obviously corrupt rendering:

A. Three, a square where, a diadem and a square.

Now diadem appears a very possible mistake for diamond, but "a square where" is most mysterious In type there does not appear any resemblance that might account for it, but if the word "asher" be written out carelessly and the top of the "a" left open the two first letters together will bear some resemblance to a "w" and a copyist ignorant of the real word intendent might well have read it so. He would thus seem to have before him the word "wher" and would quite naturally take it for "where" even if it did make no sense. If we could suppose that he might have had before him a copy that spelled "asher" with a final "e" it would be all the more natural. But abbreviations and variegated spellings were so universal at the time we may suppose this copy to have been made that the supposition is hardly necessary.

The conclusion then that we come to as a result of this discussion is that five out of the eight documents referring to jewels agreed on there being the square ashlar, diamond and square." And though, as we have seen, these five fall into two groups in each of which the exemplars are so closely related that they should be taken rather as representing two independent witnesses, yet as this throws back the date of their originals it also tends to augment their weight.

The three remaining references are as follows: In the Sloane M. S.

No. 3329, we have:

How many jewels belong to your lodge?

There are three, the square pavement, the blazing star and the Danty Tassley.

The Chetwode Crawley M. S. has:

Are there any jewells in your lodge?

Three, Perpendester, Square Pavement and an brobed Mall.

While the Mason's Confession has a more extended version:

- How many jewels in your lodge?
- Three.
- What are these three?
- A square pavement, a dinted ashlar and a broached dornal.

What's the square pavement for?

For the Master to draw his ground draughts on.

What's the dinted ashlar for?

To adjust the square and make the gages by.

What's the broached dornal for?

For me the younger and last Entered Prentice to learn to broach upon.

Before proceeding to discuss these it may be useful to quote what Prichard in his Masonry Dissected has to say on the matter. Prichard is the first record we have of two groups of jewels called movable and immovable. The former according to him are those which (following the innovation brought in by the Baltimore Convention) are now called the immovable in America. Those that he thus distinguishes are the "Trasel board, rough ashlar and broached thurnel." Following which comes the question:

What are their uses?

Trasel Board for the Master to draw his designs upon, the Rough Ashlar for the Fellowcrafts to try their jewels upon and the Broached Thurnel for the Enter'd 'Prentice to learn to work upon.

As the movable jewels spoken of immediately preceding are "the square, level and plumbrule," we may legitimately suppose that these are also the jewels of the Fellowcrafts here spoken of as tested on the ashlar. These however we will pass for the time being, remarking, however, that the passage bears out the opinion that the older usage is to call these implements "jewels" and not "tools."

In the four accounts just given of the jewels of the lodge it would seem at first sight that they disagreed with each other as much as they vary from those previously discussed. Yet three of them coincide in speaking of a square pavement, while two agree with the earlier

set in mentioning an ashlar. Closer examination may reveal other identities concealed under the differing phraseology.

PRICHARD'S VERSION

Though less extended in form, Prichard's version seems to bear considerable resemblance to that of the Confession. Both agree on that mysterious and much discussed object the "Broached Thurnel" or "Dornal," for there can be no doubt that these are but dialectal variants of the same word. Both also mention an ashlar, though in the one case it is rough and in the other "dinted." Still it would appear that the same thing was intended in each case. It is true that in Prichard the "Square Pavement" is replaced by the "Trasel Board", which is probably the prototype both of the English "tracing board" and the American "trestle board," yet both are explained as intended for the Master to draw his plans on. In fact, the explanations of all three are equivalent and couched in very similar language. The ashlar would appear to have been used as a test block for trying the accuracy of the working tools while the "dornal" or "thurnel" was for the Apprentice to learn to work on.

Prichard's work is of very doubtful character, but whatever conclusions we may come to regarding it, it is impossible to believe that it was pure invention. However he may have modified and rearranged the material before him it is practically certain that he copied from earlier documents. As we have them his three catechisms bear internal evidence of being compilations, and we might suppose that he had built them up out of similar documents to those we now know as the Old Catechisms. It would seem that such variant forms as he knew were combined and sometimes given different applications. If this were not done by him then it was by others before him, and really this seems the more probable hypothesis, for his work was but a catch-penny publication and it hardly seems likely that he would have gone to any unnecessary trouble to edit his material; unnecessary that is from his point of view, seeing that his object was only to turn a more or less honest penny.

Immediately preceding the questions relating to the jewels we find in the "Dissection" the following:

- Have you any furniture in your Lodge?
- Yes.
- What is it?
- Mosaic pavement, blazing star and indented tarsel.

What are they?

Mosaic pavement the ground floor of the Lodge, Blazing Star the Centre and indented tarsel the border round about it. What is the other furniture of a Lodge?

Bible, Compass and Square.

Other and later authorities describe the first group not as furniture but as ornaments, but its resemblance to the set of jewels given in the Sloane M. S. is so striking that it makes us suspect that jewel, furniture and ornament were then all very fluid terms, and not used with the technical precision that later came into vogue. While the "Danty tassley" of the older version might seem an ignorant corruption of "indented tessel," or of the "indented or tesselated border," the phrase more familiar to English Masons, yet second thoughts lead us to suspend judgment. It may really be that both are due to attempts to rationalize a phrase already corrupt and obscure.

REFERENCES

The same works should be consulted as were given in the February Study Club, page 59. The paper by Bro. Herbert Poole in the last part issued of A. Q. C. will be of assistance. A notice of this appeared in the August BUILDER, page 252.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

In what way can the present use in the ritual of the term "jewel" be best explained?

What was the original badge or insignia of office of the Master of a lodge?

Could the phrase, "all the implements of Masonry," as used in the American ritual of the Third Degree have a reference to a time when Master Mason was equivalent to Master of a Lodge?