

Sunday Masonic Paper No. 721

Masonic Vocabulary in the 1st Degree

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Brethren, we have all heard hundreds of Masonic charges delivered to candidates. Unfortunately, we have all heard some charges delivered in which the vocabulary was pronounced without accuracy or was pronounced haphazardly. The listener just knew that the Brother delivering the charge was unsure of the pronunciation; however, by uttering some kind of sound he could convince himself that he was fulfilling his duty.

The purpose of this paper is to examine some of the vocabulary and terminology of our ritual which lends itself to mispronunciation, misunderstanding or uncertainty. In a few instances I have simply defined a word or phrase.

Cowan -one who practises Masonry without benefit of regular training or initiation into the craft...one who learns the work illegally

"Vouchsafe Thine Aid Almighty Father and Supreme Governor of the Universe..."

Grant or give Thine Aid by graciousness Almighty Father..

"Endue him with a competency of Thy Divine Wisdom..." (COM-pe-ten-cy)

Invest, endow or give to him a sufficient quantity of Thy Divine Wisdom

"...which I trust he will answer with candour."

...which I trust he will answer with sincerity, honesty."

"...prompted to solicit those privileges from a favourable opinion preconceived of the Order..."

...inspired to make petition for those privileges from a favourable opinion of the Order which was formed in advance.

"Masonry, being free, requires a perfect freedom of inclination in every candidate for its mysteries".

...requires a perfect freedom of mind set in every candidate

"...It is founded on the purest principles of piety..."

...It is founded on the purest principles of reverence, regard for God

hele - to conceal; cover up

"...or otherwise them delineate"

to portray in words; describe or represent pictorially

"These several points I solemnly S. to observe, without evasion, equivocation or mental reservation of any kind..."

I solemnly swear to abide by the promises avowed, without avoidance or uncertainty or any exception or qualification that I might make quietly to myself.

North side Secrets:

"But I must premise, for your general information..." (preMISE)

Set forth beforehand, as by way of introduction or explanation.

"...and your feet of the rectitude of your actions."

...and your feet of the rightness or correctness of your conduct

In the Apron Charge:

"...with whom you are at variance, or towards whom you entertain feelings of animosity"

With whom you are in a state of difference or disagreement, or towards whom you entertain feelings of ill will or enmity which tends to display itself in action.

From the Charge at the N.E. Angle:

"I trust I need not here dilate... (DI-late) upon...its many excellences"

.....speak at length upon its many merits or virtues

"Suffice it to say, that it has the approbation of heaven and of earth.."

Suffice it to say, that it has the approval of heaven and of earth...

"...members of rank and affluence;...."

...members of a high position or standing and with an abundance of wealth or material Possessions

"...are daily sinking into the sere and yellow leaf of old age;..."

...stages of drying up and withering of old age

"...secondly, to evince to the brethren that you had neither M. nor M.S." (e-VINCE)

.....to prove or demonstrate

From the Working Tools Charge:

"Though recognized by various artists under different appellations..."

Though recognized by various artists under different names, titles or designations

"...of such exquisite temper as to compensate for the diminutiveness of its size."

(COM-pen-sate) (di-MIN-u-tiv-ness)

.....the degree of hardness of steel to counterbalance; offset; or make up for the smallness of its size.

"But as we are not operative but rather F and A or speculative Masons..."

We are theoretical, operating on abstract reasoning rather than practical Masons

"...that nothing short of indefatigable exertion can induce the habit of virtue..."

(in-de-FA-ti-ga-ble) ...nothing short of tireless exertion can produce or cause the habit of goodness.

From the Charge re: the Warrant and Constitution:

"...both of which I recommend to your most serious perusal and contemplation ..."

Both of which I recommend that you read very slowly, carefully and thoughtfully.

From the JW's Lecture:

"...to which they bear a near affinity." (a-FI-ni-ty)

..to which they have a close resemblance or connection.

"Unwilling to expose their mysteries to vulgar eyes"

...to the eyes of the common people

"...concealed their particular tenets and principles under certain hieroglyphical figures,..." (TEN-ets) (hi-er-o-GLIF-i-cal)

tenet...any opinion, principle, doctrine or the like which is held as true

hieroglyphical...adj pertaining to the writing system of the ancient Egyptians, in which graphic symbols or pictures were used to portray words...it could also refer to a figure or a symbol with a hidden meaning.

"The Pythagorean System seems to have been established on a similar plan...example."

(Py-tha-gor-E-an) This system developed by the learned Greek mathematician, Pythagoras, is a system of numerology. The letters of the alphabet are each assigned a number, which number is then given a psychological meaning. E.g. A = 1, B = 2 etc. When you get to I = 9, you start over with J = 1, K = 2 etc. Therefore, when the ritual refers to the Pythagorean System being established on a similar plan, it is referring to the alphabet symbolizing something else or having a deeper meaning than letters forming words.

"...every character, figure and emblem has a moral tendency and serves to inculcate the practice of virtue."

...every character, figure and emblem is moving in a moral direction and serves to teach persistently and earnestly the practice of virtue (goodness).

"Let me first direct...parallelepipedon." ...a parallelogram with 6 faces or a 6-sided figure with all dimensions being parallel (4 walls, a ceiling and a floor)

"Secondly, the many pious prayers and ejaculations offered up by King David which actually appeased the wrath of God and stayed a pestilence ...imprudently ...numbered"

Because he had unwisely performed a census of his people, the Almighty presented King David with a choice of 1 out of 3 punishments i.e. 1) 7 yrs of famine; 2) 3 days of a plague; or, 3) running before his enemies for a period of 3 months. David chose the plague and for a period of 3 days a deadly epidemic raged among his people during which 70,000 were taken. In order to pacify God that the disease might stop, David offered up many prayers, burnt offerings and shouted aloud with

reverent exclamations.

Celestial - pertaining to the spiritual or invisible heaven

Canopy - an ornamental roof like projection or covering

"...figuratively speaking, an ethereal mansion, veiled from mortal eyes by the starry firmament."

...thinking in terms of a picture or diagram, a celestial or heavenly mansion

"...today we may tread in the flowery meads of prosperity..."

...today we may walk in the flowery meadows of good fortune

From the Charge To The Newly Initiated Candidate:

"...it conduces to make all those honourable who are strictly obedient to its precepts."

... it leads to the result that all those who are strictly obedient to its directions as to moral conduct are worthy of high respect.

"...as may best conduce to the preservation of your corporeal and mental faculties in their fullest energies..." (Con-DUCE)
(Cor-POR-e-al)

...as may best lead to the result that all bodily and mental natural abilities are kept safe from harm or injury , this being accomplished to the fullest extent of a Mason's capability .

"Secrecy may be said to consist in the inviolable adherence to the obligations you have entered into..."

Secrecy may be said to be made up of an almost sacred fidelity to the spoken vows into which the Mason has entered.

"So must your obedience be proved by a close conformity to our laws and regulations..."

So must your obedience be proved by complying very closely with the established rules and regulations of our Order.

"...by modest and correct demeanor..."

By having or showing a due regard for the decencies of behaviour, speech, dress etc.

"...by ready acquiescence in all votes and resolutions passed by the brethren..." (Ac-qui-E-scence)

By ready and quiet agreement in all votes and resolutions...

"...to the study of such of the liberal arts and sciences as may lie within the compass of your attainment, ..."

As may lie within the scope of your ability to acquire knowledge.

Brethren, as I became more and more involved in putting this work together it occurred to me that a newly initiated Mason listens to numerous terms and vocabulary with which he may have little or no familiarity. It is absolutely imperative, then, that the candidate hear the correct pronunciation and enunciation of the words in the ritual. Poor pronunciation or slurred over words is not acceptable. I would hope that any Brother delivering a charge would be so conscientious in his responsibility as to know how to accurately and effectively pronounce every word of his charge. I would also hope that, if he has any doubt whatsoever, he would make every effort to make himself completely conversant in the charge for which he is responsible. Any Brother doing ritualistic work must be knowledgeable and confident in his ability to, not only deliver the charge correctly, but to deliver it with a sufficient depth of feeling and expression.

In the Jr. Warden's lecture alone, a candidate listens to countless words and terms; he hears allegories and sufficient symbolism that could cause him to scratch his head in absolute bewilderment. Might it not be logical then, to conclude that one of the reasons we lose so many newly made Masons is that they are so bewildered by all that they have heard in a short space of time that they make a hasty uninformed decision? that they conclude that Masonry is not for them, so as to avoid being embarrassed by their ignorance? If this idea has merit, then it follows that a major consideration for us should be: "Does/did the candidate understand the terminology and symbolism of the degree?" If the answer is 'No', then let's make it our number one priority to inform him and, in equal measure, let's make certain that the information he receives is 100 per cent accurate. If we can make our new Masons comfortable with the vocabulary, with the symbolism, the allegories and the significance of our ritual, we stand a much greater chance of being able to maintain his interest and perhaps keep him within the Masonic fold for the rest of his life. It is in the best interests of our fraternity to make every effort to accomplish this goal.