



The Overy Papers

Number 7 - The Due Guard

Fraternal Greetings Brethren

The Following Discussions are taken from papers of various people such as Bro. Bernard Jones and Bro. Wildey Atchison. The French is my own and even after a year in France the only person who could understand my French is my wife.

The Due Guard

Lodges have always had small differences in their rituals but the grip, the sign and the password are parts that one would expect to be sacrosanct in their use, to enable us to be fully international.

But the one exception that I know of, is the use of the Due Guard. The Due Guard has been the cause of much historical discussion and the writing of many learned papers, from its conception, though its demise and about its meaning and origins today.

The Due Guard is a sign that is coupled with the penal sign and used in our lodge, which uses the Ancient Ritual.

There is no doubt that the "Due Guard" was in use in the English lodges of the early eighteenth century, and some think it may have been inspired by an operative practice but personally I doubt that.

Today the Due Guard, I understand, still survives in a very few English lodges, is still in use in most Irish lodges, and in a few lodges throughout North America. Lodges in the USA often lay as much emphasis on the Due Guard in their ceremonies, as they do on the penal sign of the degree.

As we know the Due Guard relates to the attitude of the candidate at the time of taking his Obligation in the three degrees. It is a sign in itself although it is coupled with the penal sign. It is thought its purpose is to protect the penal sign like that of a keeper-ring, which is used alongside another more valuable ring to keep it securely on the finger.

So the Due Guard is just that, a keeper and originally a protection against the accidental use of the real or penal sign of the degree. Any invitation to

give the penal sign would immediately demand for the Due Guard. Thus, without the Due Guard a Brother would not pass on the penal sign of the degree.

The problem with this security is that apparently, every separate rite in the American system appears to have its own individual Due Guard and in the Irish system the Due Guard is only used in the First and Third degrees of the Craft. This was possibly because; originally the rituals only had two degrees before their rearrangement and the Fellowcraft degree was introduced.

In England most Masons do not even know it exists, a problem that I discovered, when on joining this lodge at my board of trial, I thought I had got myself involved with a clandestine lodge.

So what does the term Due Guard mean, well again there is many variations. Looking at it from a translation point of view is not a lot of help, and many well known historians have even contradicted themselves, in the translation of the two words.

Personally I do not feel our ritulists in the 18th Century would have been so devious as to come up with a complex meaning.

In historical research one must always look for the simple concept and not get caught up in flights of fantasy, as so many have, in the history of Freemasonry.

In both the early French and English Language the word Dieu means 'God' so maybe there is some connection there.

The 1935 edition of the Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs it gives a references to an old Proverb "a becke is as good as a 'Dieu Gard", the word Becke means nod "a nod is as good as a Dieu Gard." Meaning a nod of approval is as good as the word of God.

The modern interpretation by the way is "a nod is as good as a wink"

In both the old French and old English languages there were similar polite salutations. The French it is, dieu vous garde or 'God Keep You', while the English salutation it is 'Dieugard' or 'May God Guard You.'

So what are we left with? The French Language has always been open to errors in English pronunciations, as you have no doubt heard listening to an English man speaking French. A "Billet doux" for example is a common English slang for "Billy do" used for a note or ticket where in actual fact, translated it is a love letter.

So to end my discussion I feel we should take the translation literally and accept the usual expected spelling errors and that it means 'May God Guard You,' where 'You' is the penal sign.

I personally think it would be a pity to see the "due guard" become obsolete as it makes our lodge ritual just that little bit different.

So to close I use the words of Bro Bernard Jones from his discussions on the subject.

"While Freemasonry is said to be universal, we all know that there are some slight differences in ritual and custom among all the Grand Lodges in the world.

However interesting these slight differences are, it is even more important to understand that these slight differences are just that - slight. Freemasonry is Freemasonry and despite our differences we are Brothers who can always learn from each other.

Thank you and whatever I say may we continue in peace and harmony.

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