



Notes from a Preceptor's Handbook

A Preceptor:

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

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

Fred & Charlie ask.....



Why do we say So mote it Be?

And what does it mean?

'So mote it be...'

Charlie had made his weekly shopping trip for Fred. Despite the clampdown on meetings he was as enthusiastic about his Freemasonry as ever and enjoyed the chance of a chat with Fred. Over their coffee he reflected: *'We use many phrases so often on Masonic occasions that most of us have long ago ceased to wonder what they actually mean. Take "So mote it be", for example. Is it the same as 'Amen' and, if not, what's the difference?'*

Fred smiled. *'Do you remember Humpty Dumpty and his advice that 'When I use a word it means just what I want it to mean, no more, no less...?' He might well have had the word 'mote' in mind'. Charlie raised a questioning eyebrow.*

Fred shrugged. *'Well, in the Middle Ages the word could mean the rallying blast on a hunting horn, the Order of the Day on a military bugle, a speck of dust in the eye (balancing the beam!) or the hill on which a castle was erected (as distinct from a M-O-A-T which provided its watery defences...). Take your pick.'*

Fred warmed to his theme. *'If that's not confusing enough it could also be used as an useful alternative to the words 'could', 'would', 'may' or 'must'.'*

Charlie couldn't help teasing. *'Gosh, you certainly know your English dictionary, Fred – but do you know your Masonry equally well?'*

Fred laughed. *'Try me. There's evidence that both 'Amen' and 'So mote it be' were in use by the Guild Craft Masons as early as the C14, often combining the two as in the Regius Craft manuscript:*

'Amen, amen, so mote it be

So say we all for sweet charity'

'So mote it be' here might have meant simply 'so must it be' or 'let it be so' but then, disconcertingly, that is often the meaning of 'Amen'.'

Charlie looked puzzled. *'So what's the difference?'*

'Its the word 'Amen'. It can also have a deeply religious significance. It was Hebrew in origin and was used to confirm earlier statements in prayer, Blessings, Psalms or in liturgy generally. In Christian practice its use was stronger still. It confirmed the spiritual truth of all that had preceded it. By the time of St John even Jesus Christ become known as the 'Great Amen'.'

'When the Moderns and Antients came together as the United Grand Lodge in 1813 they agreed to have a common and universal ritual. This meant removing from the ceremonies any reference to a specific religion - including of course the many remaining Christian symbols, prayers and phrases. Because of the close connection between 'Amen' and the Christian liturgy it may also have seemed appropriate at the time to remove the first (religious) word from the old Guild Craft phrase 'Amen so mote it be' leaving just the second (secular) part of the phrase'.

Charlie nodded. *'That makes good sense – but I'm sure I've heard some still say 'Amen' at the dining table.'*

Fred agreed. *'Many of us use 'So mote it be' in the Temple and 'Amen' after Grace when dining'.*

'Why the difference?', queried Charlie.

'Simple. The response to Grace at table is a very personal one and not a Masonic ritual. 'Amen' is therefore perfectly acceptable as an affirmation to a Grace in the Dining Room for anyone who chooses to use it.'

As Charlie said his farewells he added dryly: *'Amen, Amen, so mote it be – Fred explains it all with his great clarity...'* He successfully sidestepped the wet garden sponge being thrown in his direction.

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