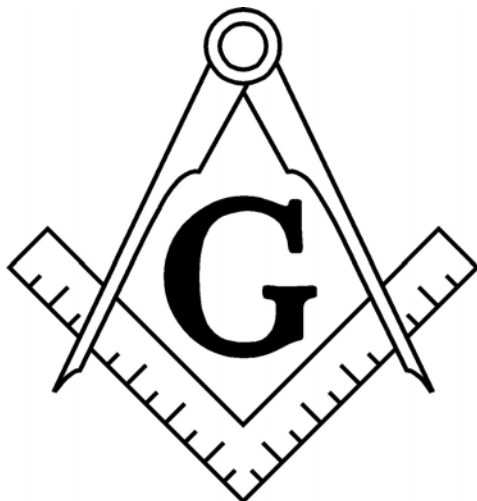




BOOKLET NO. 4

THE LODGE SYSTEM

OF MASONIC EDUCATION



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INTERPRETATION OF THE RITUAL OF THE THIRD DEGREE

My Brother:

You have now been Raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason. It is indeed a “sublime” Degree, one to which a man might devote his whole time in study for years to come without exhausting it. Undoubtedly, you realized this yourself as you participated in its mysteries, so you may now appreciate a hint as to its meaning.

Almost any interpretation of it, especially one as brief as this, must necessarily be a hint only, and that for the sake of stimulating a man to reflect upon it for himself and to study it more thoroughly in the future.

In the First and Second Degrees, you found yourself surrounded by the symbols and emblems of architecture; in the Third Degree, you found yourself in a different order of symbolism, one cast in the language of the soul—its life, its tragedy, and its triumph. To recognize this fact is the first step in interpretation.

The second step is to recognize that the Ritual of the Third Degree by its nature, and purpose, may lawfully have many meanings; it is not intended to be a lesson, written complete, finished, closed up; but rather to be a pointing out of paths, a new departure, a series of inspirations, an awakening of all the faculties, like a great drama, picture or symphony to which one may evermore return to find new meanings as in an inexhaustible fountain-head of truth.

For this reason, there may be a number of interpretations of the Degree, and they may all be true at one and the same time. It is, for example, lawful to explain it as a drama of old age, with its attendant losses, sorrows, evils, and its final end. It is also lawful to find in it a drama of the Immortality of the soul, how in it, is set forth the truth that while a man withers away and perishes there is that in him which perishes not.

For my own part I shall suggest to you another interpretation, equally lawful, based on the fact that at the center of the Degree is a dying and a Raising again. That this is the meaning most generally adopted by the Craft is shown by our habits of language; we say that a man is initiated an Entered Apprentice, passed to the Degree of Fellow Craft, and raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason; by this it appears that it is the Raising that most Masons have found at the center of the conferral of this Sublime Degree. What does this Raising signify? If you have the answer to this question you can afterwards find your own way into all the meanings of the Degree.

The life of a man organizes itself into a number of different groups of experience, each of a different kind from the others. Consider what these are, a few of them. There are those experiences, which are incidental to our passage through time, from childhood, through manhood, to old age. There are those incidentals to the life of the body; hunger, sleep, weariness, the senses, the feelings, etc. There are those, which cluster about the home and the family. There are those, which have to do with religion, worship, God, the meaning and purpose of life. There are those, which have to do with a man’s work, his trade or occupation, how he makes a living for himself and his dependents. There are those, which center about his life in the community, a social being, as a neighbor or a citizen. Unless one is adequate to live in and to deal with each and all of these groups of facts, circumstances, realities, and experiences, he cannot be happy.

Now it is probable that the most difficult of all these to deal with—one not mentioned above—is that group made up of the daily living of life; in this are such hard experiences as sin, defeat, suffering, disease, pain, loss of friends or fortune, enmity, treachery, crime, wickedness, sorrow, and death. Herein lies our greatest problems, our most trying ordeals, our severest tests; if we can find the wisdom to deal with these, if we can triumph over them and solve their problems, our characters will be made secure, our happiness will be assured. What are you doing about the weaknesses, in yourself and in the failing of the world about you, is a question life asks of each of us, and if we fail to find the right answer, it enforces upon us the worst of all penalties.

Let us go one-step further. As it comes to us evil may take two forms; it may be brought upon us by our own acts, or it may be brought upon us through no responsibility of our own. If evil comes upon a man by his own acts we feel that it is a just compensation; but what of the evil that comes upon a good man? Such an event we call a tragedy, and tragedy is the supreme form of evil.

It is evil in the form of tragedy that is set forth in the Drama of the Third Degree. Here is a good and wise man, not a destroyer but a builder, working for others and giving others work, and whose work is the highest we know, for it is dedicated wholly to God. Through no fault of his own he is set upon by men who formerly have been friends and fellow-Masons; he is tortured and killed and his body thrown to the rubbish. Here is tragedy pure and unalloyed, and it is a complete picture of all human tragedy whatsoever.

How did the Craft meet this tragedy? The first step was to impose upon the ruffians the supreme penalty; they had themselves possessed the will to destruction and therefore they had themselves become evils; such evils had to be destroyed lest another tragedy follow. This means that the greatest enemy man has is that which makes war upon the good and man himself; to that enemy no quarter can be given.

The next step was to discipline and then to pardon those who acted, not out of an evil will, but out of weakness. Forgiveness is possible if a man himself condemns the evil he has done, because it means that in spite of his weakness he retains his faith in the good.

The next step was to recover from the wreckage caused by the tragedy whatever of value it had left undestroyed. Confusion had come upon the Craft; order was restored. Loyal Craftsmen took up the burdens dropped by the traitors; it is ever thus; it is in the nature of such tragedy that the good suffer for the evil, and it is one of the prime duties of life that a man shall toil to undo the harm wrought by sin and crime, else in time the world would be destroyed by the evils that are done in it.

But what of the victim of the tragedy? Here we come upon the profoundest and most difficult lesson of the Drama, difficult to understand, difficult to believe if one has not been truly initiated into the realities of the spiritual life. Because the victim was a good man, his goodness rooted in an unvarying faith in God, that which destroyed him in one sense could not destroy him in another. There was that in him which rose above the reach of evil; there was that in him by virtue of which he was raised again from a dead level to a living perpendicular. Our name for that is the spirit.

Let us imagine a genuinely good man who has been the victim of a tragedy. Let us imagine this to have been one of the most terrible kinds of tragedy, one caused by the treachery of friends. Let us further imagine that this treachery has brought destruction upon one of the foundations of his life, his home, his reputation, or his ability to earn a livelihood. How can he be lifted above it? How can he be raised above the clutch of such circumstances? How can he emerge as possibly a happier man than he was before? By his spirit rising to the level of pity, of forgiveness, of resignation, or self-sacrifice, a refusal to stoop to retaliation or to harbor bitterness. It is in such a spirit as this that the truest happiness is found.

The power to rise to such a level, or to express it in other language, the secret of such a power, is in the Third Degree symbolized by the Word. If that Word is lost, a man must search for it; if a man possesses that Word, he has the Royal Secret of the Masonic Art. The symbolism of the Lost Word, the meaning of the *Search For That Which Was Lost*, has so inspired Masonic writers and speakers that the average Mason, especially a new Member, is not to be blamed if he finds it hard to settle on a simple particular explanation. Upon reflection, however, we find a set of conditions in the Drama of the Third Degree not unlike the basic elements of our own daily lives. Put yourself in the character of Hiram Abiff for the moment and consider that, just as he was engaged, with all his skill and devotion, in rearing a magnificent Temple that would meet with the approval of King Solomon, so are you striving day by day to build a life that will be acceptable to the Supreme Being—to God Himself. As simple as that, is the lesson we are to learn from the loss of the Word and the never-ending search for it. Never-ending because perfection is not to be attained in our earthly lives. We cannot approach perfection, make even a start toward it, except through the constant practice of those spiritual precepts laid down for us in the Great Light in Masonry. To rest our faith in God, to pattern our daily lives according to His Word, to put loyalty above expediency, to undergo with fidelity and sacrifice any hardship or danger, to ever strive for His sign-posts along the way toward a better life here, and the assurance of eternal salvation hereafter.

SYMBOLS, EMBLEMS, AND ALLEGORIES OF THE THIRD DEGREE

By this time in your experience with the Ritual and from your meetings with us you have learned that every phase, event, and other detail in the ceremonies of Initiation are full of meaning; not a single item is in them merely for effect or as an ornament. This is especially true of the Third Degree. In it, you will find, to a larger extent than elsewhere, the deeper secrets and profounder teachings of our Fraternity. You passed throughout the Degree in one evening; to understand it will require many evenings, and though you may study it for years to come you will never exhaust it. I can give you but a few hints of its meaning, and those in the hope that they may inspire you to study the Degree for yourself.

The symbolism of the First and Second Degree was for the most part designed around the art of architecture, its purpose was to teach you to be a builder, in the First a builder of yourself, in the Second a builder of society. In the Third Degree the symbolism takes another form, although its background continues to be architecture, and its action takes place in a Temple; it is a spiritual symbolism, cast in the form of the life and death of the soul. Its principal teaching is that if a man has permitted himself to be buried under the rubbish-heap of his sins and passions and lusts, it is possible for him, if he has learned the secret of the spiritual life, and with the help of God and of the Brotherhood, to rise again into a new life. This teaching gives us the key to the whole Degree, and in the light of it all its symbols, emblems, and allegories must be understood.

This note is struck in the Scripture Reading, part of a chapter out of the Book of Ecclesiastes. In this chapter, we have the picture of a man, once flushed with health and filled with strength, who is now brought tottering by old age to the brink of the grave. This last breakdown in human nature is one of the bitterest of all the experiences man is called upon to bear, but even this, the chapter tells us, will become a light burden by him who has learned to trust in God, for God is the God of old age and of the soul after death as much as He is the God of youth and strength.

The Working Tools of the Degree are all the implements of Masonry, but chiefly the Trowel, by which we are taught to lay the cement of Brotherly Love. But Brotherly Love itself has its source and seat in the soul. To love a man above his sins, to cherish him in spite of his faults, to forgive him in all sincerity, to bear with him and to forbear, all this is possible to us only as we live in the spiritual life and have our souls purged of lust and selfishness.

The tragedy of Hiram Abiff is the climax of the Degree; is, indeed the climax of all the ceremonies of Masonry of whatever Degree. Next in importance to it, and in many ways equal in interest to it, is that acted allegory called *The Search For That Which Was Lost*. This allegory has a historical background. To the early Jewish people a name was something peculiarly identified with a person, and always was held in reverence, sometimes was kept in secret and a substitute name was used in daily life; it was natural for them therefore to hold the name of God in extreme reverence. In their earliest period, this Holy Name was never pronounced above a whisper; after a while only the priests were permitted to use it, finally only the High Priest, and then he whispered it when alone in the Holy of Holies on the great Day of Atonement. During some national calamity, perhaps at the time of the Babylonian Captivity, the High Priest was destroyed before he had opportunity to pass it on to his successor. In that way, the name was lost.

This historical incident appears in our Ritual in the form of an allegory. A Word was possessed, the Word was lost. A Word which had been lost was sought.

What does this mean? Like all symbols, it means many things at once. However, one of its profounder meanings is that if a man lost the ideals and standards of his youth, his character, his faith in truth and goodness. The secret of what it is to be a man, he must, if he is to live the Masonic life, go in search of that which was lost, and continue until he finds it. Without manhood it is useless to be a man.

You may wonder why it is that the Ritual itself does not explain fully and clearly the meaning of this symbolism and all the others like it, why it leaves it to the candidate to find out the meanings for himself. There are three reasons for this silence, apparently so strange; first, there isn't sufficient time; to explain them all fully would require not three evenings but thirty, and perhaps three hundred. Second, it is one of the secrets of the Masonic life that we grow by what we do for ourselves infinitely more than, by what others do for us; moreover, the Ritual pre-supposes that we are grown men, not boys in school, and that each of us will have the ability to do his own thinking. Third, the method of the Ritual is to bring us into the presence of the greater truths of life and to keep us there, knowing that their mere presence will in the long run have a deep influence over us; each man is left to work them out in detail according to his own needs.

This is especially true of the emblems of the Third Degree. One after another of these is set before us, apparently in no given order, and each with only the slenderest hint as to what it signifies. Yet each one of them stands for some great idea or ideal, most necessary to us throughout our lives; and the purpose of bringing them before us in this manner is to plant them in our consciousness, to keep them always in our presence.

In each of them is a master truth. In the Three Pillars we have the three great ideas of wisdom, of strength, of beauty. In the Three, Five, and Seven Steps we have the idea of progress, of making our way upwards, and of how the ascent to a richer and truer life is always made in stages, and against many obstacles; progress is always difficult, but it is always necessary. The Three Steps remind us of youth, manhood, and old age, of how each is a unity itself, each possesses its own duties and problems, and each calls for its own philosophy. The Pot of Incense means that, of all forms of worship, to be pure and blameless in our inner lives is more acceptable to God than anything else, better than incense, because that which a man really is, is of vastly greater importance than that which he appears to be. The Book of Constitutions is the emblem of law, not alone as it is in statutes and ordinances, which may change from time to time, but rather that our moral and spiritual character is grounded in law and order as much as government is, or nature, and no man can live a satisfactory life who lives lawlessly. The Sword Pointing to the Naked Heart means that one of the

most rigorous of these laws is justice, and that if a man be unjust in his heart, which means at the center of his being, the inevitable results of injustice will find him out. The All-Seeing Eye means that we live and move and have our being in God, that we do not stand in His presence, as children might think, only when we pray or are in church or on Sundays, but that we are constantly in His presence, wherever we are or whatever we are doing. The Anchor and the Ark stand for that sense of security and stability, which one has when his life is grounded in truth and faith; without that sense there can be no happiness or peace of mind. The 47th Problem of Euclid is an emblem of the arts and sciences; by them we are reminded that next to sinfulness the most dangerous enemy of life is ignorance. In the Hour Glass we have the emblem of the transitoriness of life; no man lives forever here in this world; there is a set time for the work he has to do. The Scythe reminds us that passing time will bring an end to our lives as well as to our work, and if ever we are to become what we know we ought to be, we must not delay.

What if a man has reached middle years and finds when he stands before these undeniable and all-important truths that he has missed them, or been faithless to them, has gone backward and not forward, is not blameless in his heart, lives unjustly, has ignored the fact that his life is in God's hands, and has neglected to take into account the swift passage of time so that he has made a wreck of his life and finds himself buried under a pile of rubbish? Is there hope for him? It is the central teaching of the Master Mason Degree, expressed in the tragedy of Hiram Abiff, that there is a way for him to recover the possession of his own life, that he can be raised to a new manhood, lifted from a dead level—which means the level of death! —to a living perpendicular. He may be called back from a grave that is more terrible than the dissolution of the body. By dying to his old life, by repudiating it, by finding again his faith in God—for the power of God and the Power of the Brotherhood are there for him as much as for any man—this is the path of his recovery.

THE DUTIES, PRIVILEGES, AND RIGHTS OF A MASTER MASON

You will not find the duties, privileges, and rights of a Master Mason anywhere in Freemasonry existing in list form, clearly stated, and numbered and in so many words. Rather, they are scattered here and there, each in its own proper context, some in the form of symbols, others in the form of customs, others still in the form of laws, and some are explicit while others are implied. I shall therefore make no effort to present you with any exhaustive catalog of them but instead will deal with them all together, in a general way.

A Master Mason's first duty is obviously to live and act consistently with all the points covered by his Obligation; unless this is done, he cannot perform his other duties nor will he be able to claim his rights and privileges. With this laid down as a foundation, we can pass on to discuss in detail a number of those duties and rights which necessarily follow.

It is a Master Mason's duty, legal or moral, to pay his share of the financial costs of the Fraternity, promptly and ungrudgingly, and whether in the form of dues or taxes, of assessments, or of voluntary appeals.

He has the right of holding Membership in a Lodge and it is his duty to do so. He may himself choose the Lodge with which he wishes to affiliate, there being no law to compel him to join one rather than another, but he must seek Membership in some Lodge. Our Constitution and Regulations provide that if he willfully remains unaffiliated for one year or more he "shall not be allowed to visit any Lodge, or join in a Masonic procession, nor be entitled to receive Masonic relief or burial."

From this, it follows that he has the right of affiliation. If he moves permanently to some other community, he is not required to maintain Membership at a distance in his first Lodge. In fact, it is

his duty, in such a case, to transfer his Membership to a Lodge near his new home, unless he has very good reason, such as a Life Membership. Perpetual Memberships are transferable within the State of Florida.

Visiting in Lodges in which he does not hold Membership is both a right and a privilege, though not a duty. It is a right in the sense that he may at will seek to gain admittance into any regular Lodge; it is a privilege in the sense that his admittance into some given Lodge is contingent upon his being vouched for, or examined, and of being permitted to enter by the Worshipful Master. However, any Member of the Lodge may voice an objection, to the Worshipful Master (as long as that objection is not based on religious, creed, origin, or race), against permitting a particular visitor to enter his Lodge room, which is sufficient to exclude such a visitor. But if a Mason is not permitted to enter some given Lodge at a certain time the fact does not cancel his right to seek to visit it at another time or to seek to visit any other Lodge.

If he seeks to visit a given Lodge, he has the right to be vouched for if some Member of it has sat in Lodge with him or otherwise is willing to be responsible for his avouchment. This means that he is not compelled to undergo examination every time he seeks to visit.

Masonic relief, like visiting, is both a right and a privilege. It is a right as far as every Master Mason has the lawful right to ask for it upon need, without derogation of his dignity or endangering his standing, and his asking may be of some Lodge or of some other Master Mason. On the other hand, it is a privilege in that neither Lodge nor a Mason is compelled to give relief when and as requested. The Lodge is not an insurance society or a death benefit association, nor is any guarantee given any Member that he will receive what he asks for. Each Lodge and each Mason is under Obligation to heed the call for relief, but at the same time each is free to exercise judgment in a given case; whether or not to extend relief at all, and, if so, in what form.

A Master Mason has the right to ask for a dimit, and if he is clear on the books, meaning his Lodge dues are paid, and otherwise in good standing, with no charge pending against him, the Lodge must grant it. It is not compulsory that a Mason shall remain in a given Lodge, for if it were, Membership might be degraded into a penalty or a form of persecution, and it is allowed that one may hold his Membership where he is happiest or where it is most convenient.

Among the most important of all his rights is his right to trial by his peers under regulated conditions with freedom to present evidence. This assures him that no Lodge can degrade him by star-chamber methods, or that either his Lodge or any Officer or Member of it can remove him out of malice or spite, or that he can be made to suffer the extremest penalties of Masonry out of idle gossip or mere hearsay. In short, the right of trial guarantees him all the securities of justice.

If through his own fault or misadventure he is brought to trial in his own Lodge on charges of unmasonic conduct, and if he is found guilty, he has the right of appeal to Grand Lodge. This right is his guarantee against possible injustice more particularly against possible local prejudice or against spiteful persecution by some private enemy.

Every Master Mason has the right of Masonic burial; it is his family that has the right of requesting this honor, and must request his Lodge to conduct this service. This right is of more importance than it may first appear. Imagine that a man has held Membership in a Lodge for many years; imagine that without giving just cause the Lodge refuses to give him Masonic honors at death. What will the community think? It will naturally think that some secret disgrace has been attached to the dead, known only to the Lodge, and both his name and his family will suffer accordingly.

As for a Master Mason's privileges, they are to be described in principle and in spirit rather than in detail, because they vary much in detail and often depend on local conditions. He has the privilege, which also is in certain respects a right, of a voice in his Lodge, a vote, and of holding office. He has also the privilege of giving Masonic service, one of the principal sources of the joy one may find in his Masonic life. Beyond these is a set of privileges, which depend much on circumstances. A Lodge may do many things which are neither required nor prohibited by law; it may hold social affairs, give special entertainments, offer special programs, may foster some kind of Masonic educational enterprise, an employment Committee, may have a library, maintain club rooms, may maintain a bed or a ward in a hospital, a lot, a set of lots, or even a cemetery of its own, all of which it may do according to its abilities or the wishes of its Membership. The same holds true of Grand Lodge; it also, wholly out of a spirit of service and not from compulsion, offers many privileges which are as open to the individual Mason as to the Lodge. Membership gives no man the right to demand these things of either the Lodge or the Grand Lodge, but if, thanks to circumstances and good fortune, they are offered, each Member has the same right to enjoy such privileges as any other.

Beyond all the specific duties, rights, and privileges I have thus far enumerated there stands a more general region in which all are mingled together. I refer to, that whole domain of Masonry's teachings, its Ritual and symbols, its history, its ideals of Jurisprudence, its philosophy, its literature, the whole of it in so far as we describe it as a Royal Art. In so far as, the Royal Art includes truths, ideals, and teachings, every Master Mason is under a duty to be faithful to them. It is his right to be taught that Art, and to have it in its fullness, none of it being reserved for a privileged few; and it is his to enjoy all the privileges it offers to the spirit, the mind, and the heart. All that Freemasonry is, all that it means, all that it has to give or to offer, belongs to every individual Mason in the same way and to the same extent as to all others, no one of them or any group of them having any special privileges in it whatsoever. We ask you, my Brother, to bring this fact home to yourself. "To know that however onerous your duties may prove to be, or however rigidly your rights may at times appear to be regulated, all such burdens sink into nothingness by comparison with this one privilege, that Freemasonry in all its height, and breadth, and length, and richness belong to you to use and enjoy."

THE BALLOT

When in time of war a company of soldiers goes into camp for a night, the men can sleep with a sense of security only because along the frontiers of the camp certain of their comrades are on sentinel duty. The sentinel challenges all who approach; he permits none to pass or re-pass save such as are duly qualified.

The Ballot Box is Freemasonry's sentinel. It stands guard at the portals of the Craft to keep off all who are not qualified to enter; and there is peace and harmony inside those portals only so long as it remains faithful to its sentinel duties. Now that you have become a Member of this Lodge, you will discover that in a certain real sense it is the very key-stone in the arch of our organization. It is important for you, therefore, and as soon as possible, to gain a clear understanding of all it means and of the duties of a Mason with regard to it. I shall now call your attention to certain of these meanings and duties.

First, the Ballot Box gives decisive and practical expression to the principle of qualification. Freemasonry does not solicit Members. Petitioners must come of their own choice and free will. Of all those who thus come only such as have, certain necessary qualifications are eligible for

Membership. The first use of the Ballot is to decide whether in deed and truth a given petitioner possesses those qualifications.

Does a petitioner have, or does he not have, the necessary qualifications? This is the question to be decided by the Ballot, and it is the only question to be decided. To reject a candidate because of his race, religious belief or preference, or national origin, would be considered as unmasonic Conduct by a Brother. One of the first and most important lessons we as Freemasons are taught is the lesson of TOLERATION.

For this same reason, it is unmasonic for any Member of a Lodge to cast a black ball against a petitioner out of personal spite or private prejudice.

When we cast a Ballot, we act in an official capacity as a spokesman, or sentinel, for the Fraternity. We are, so to speak, a member of a jury, and it is therefore unjust for us to permit our exercise of that function to be warped by purely private feelings.

Nevertheless—and here, we come to our second point—the Ballot must be unanimous. The petition must be acceptable to every Member of the Lodge. That is to say, when the question arises whether a given man should or should not be received into our fellowship the Fraternity itself receives first consideration. This is wise and just. The Fraternity has not solicited him; he is soliciting it. It is for him to prove his fitness. Consequently, if a Member of a Lodge, not out of prejudice but out of certain knowledge, is convinced that the petitioner would disturb the peace and harmony of the Lodge, it becomes a duty to exclude him. The good and welfare of the body of men already in Membership takes precedence over the desires and ambitions of the petitioner.

Our third point is that the Ballot must be secret. It is a violation of the Constitution and Regulations of our Grand Lodge for a Member to tell how he voted, or to discuss a Ballot in open Lodge, or to discuss the petitioner. This law has two general purposes; for one thing, it protects the peace and harmony of the Lodge; for another, it protects the petitioner. As a petitioner he stands in confidential relation to the Lodge; the facts he gives about himself are personal and private, and they must be kept sacred as such; the whole transaction is private as between him and the Lodge, therefore nothing about it should ever go to the outside world. If he is rejected it is for purely Masonic reasons and these should not prejudice him in the eyes of his fellows outside the Craft.

Our fourth point is that every Member of the Lodge must vote if he is present when the Ballot is taken. This means that the Ballot Box is a duty rather than merely a privilege. Membership in the Fraternity is an office and carries official duties—as much so as the occupation of one of the chairs; and one of the chief of those official duties is to exercise a watchful care over the quality and fitness of prospective members. When a Mason becomes a Member he takes an Obligation to discharge the official duties incidental to Membership, and for that reason it is as much his duty to cast an intelligent vote as it is for the Master to preside over the Lodge.

Our fifth point is that the Ballot is independent. This means that when in voting a Member has exercised his best judgment in the performance of a duty, he is not answerable to any man, to the Lodge, or to Grand Lodge for his action, whether it is favorable to the candidate or unfavorable. This is the necessary corollary to the principle that voting is a duty; for no man can be held responsible for a duty unless he is recognized to possess the power and authority necessary to discharge it.

Officially speaking, every Masonic Lodge room has two entrances, and only two; the Outer Door and the Inner Door. The Outer Door, which is, as it were, the passageway between the Lodge and

the street, is kept sacred to Members, who alone may pass or re-pass through it. The Tyler, who works under the immediate supervision of the Worshipful Master, guards it. The Inner Door is sacred to candidates, its sole purpose being to serve as a passageway between the Lodge and the Preparation Room. What the Tyler is to the Outer Door the Ballot Box is to the Inner Door—a guard, a sentinel. It, and it alone, can decide who shall, or shall not, pass through it. No obligation rests more heavily on the shoulders of every Member than his duty to see that none pass that sentinel save such as are properly qualified.

It would be a mistake to think of the Ballot Box only from the point of view of its power to exclude the unworthy; its positive power is far more impressive. For consider! A favorable Ballot is more than a mere grudging admission of a petitioner into Membership; on the contrary, it has, at one stroke and for all time to come, decided that he is admitted into full and free fellowship with his Brethren. Your Membership in this Lodge gives you no license to raise any question as to the fitness of another Member; you cannot quarrel with him because he may belong to some race against which you may feel a prejudice. Or because he adheres to some church or religious creed in which you do not believe. Or because he votes with a political party you are opposed to, or because he may not possess the degree of social polish you consider necessary, or because he is not as learned as he ought to be, or is poor, or possesses traits and habits that may jar upon you. All questions as to the desirability or acceptability of such qualities or lack of qualities were decided with complete finality by the Ballot Box at the time his petition came before the Lodge; and that decision remains in force! It is unmasonic to consider him under perpetual probation; his period of probation ended when he was elected to Membership and received the Degrees. He has been, and is, a Brother, and it is the duty of every other Member of the Lodge to treat him as such as long as his Membership shall last.

From this rapid sketch of the rules, governing the Ballot Box you will see that when in the beginning of this talk I likened it to the sentinel on guard through the night I was guilty of no exaggeration. Now that you have consummated your Membership in this Lodge, let me urge you to reflect upon these truths so that whenever you exercise the power and prerogative of the Ballot, you will do so with a clear conception of your personal responsibilities.

ORGANIZATION IN A LODGE

You have now received the Three Degrees of Freemasonry and have consummated your Membership in this Lodge. We believe it will now be of assistance to you to describe briefly how a Lodge is organized and what its machinery is. Very few things about a Lodge are secret, the things I shall tell you are all written down in the Constitution and Regulations of our Grand Lodge.

A Lodge is an organization of twelve or more regular Master Masons empowered by Grand Lodge to confer the Three Degrees of Masonry, to do such work, and to carry on such activities as appertain thereto.

Authority to do this is conferred on it by a Charter issued by Grand Lodge. You have already been shown the Charter of our own Lodge. It was issued to us by, the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of Florida.

A Lodge can retain its Charter only as it works according to the traditions and usages of the Masonic Fraternity.

Each Lodge can make Masons only of such elected petitioners as live within what is called its Jurisdiction, unless waiver of Jurisdiction has been obtained. By “Jurisdiction” is meant that if there be only one Lodge in a city or village all persons residing nearer to it by an air line than to any other

Lodge must petition it for the Degrees; and if there be more than one Lodge, they have concurrent Jurisdiction; that is, a petitioner may make his choice among them.

A Lodge is constitutionally required to elect, at the first Stated Communication in December, five of its Officers by Ballot. These are the Worshipful Master, Senior Warden, Junior Warden, Treasurer and Secretary. Other Lodge Officers, that may be appointed by the Worshipful Master, according to the provisions in the Lodge's By-Laws, are the Senior and Junior Deacons, Chaplain, Stewards, Marshal, Organist, and Tyler.

The executive power of the Lodge is vested in the office of Worshipful Master. He has the power and duty to congregate the Members of his Lodge upon any emergency. To preside over them at every Communication; to issue summonses to the Members; to see that all the books and records are properly kept; to discharge all the executive functions; and to remove any Appointed Officer for cause he deems sufficient with the consent of the Lodge.

The Senior Warden is the second ranking Officer. If the Worshipful Master is absent, the Senior Warden presides in his place; if through absence or inability the office of Worshipful Master becomes vacant, the Senior Warden succeeds to all his prerogatives and duties for all purposes, except as pertains to the installation of Officers.

Next in authority is the Junior Warden. In case of the absence of both the Worshipful Master and the Senior Warden, the Junior Warden succeeds to all the duties and prerogatives of the Worshipful Master except those that pertain to the installation of Officers.

Neither a Master nor a Warden may resign his office.

The Secretary of the Lodge keeps its minutes and records; makes reports to the Grand Secretary; sends the annual returns to Grand Lodge; receives all money paid into the Lodge and pays same to the Treasurer; performs, in short, such duties as are suggested by his title.

The functions of the Treasurer are also described by his title. He receives Lodge money from the Secretary, keeps a just and regular account of it, and pays out money by order of the Lodge when so certified by the Master and Secretary.

The Tyler guards the Outer Door to see that nobody enters the Lodge except those entitled to do so.

For me to describe the duties of the other Officers would, at this stage of your experience, only confuse you; in due course your own experience will make you familiar with them.

In addition to these Officers a Lodge has various standing and special Committees.

The meetings of a Lodge are called "Communications." Communications of a Lodge are of two kinds; Stated or Called. Stated Communications are held at regular intervals on dates specified in the By-Laws, while a Called Communication may be held when it is necessary to meet on a date other than so specified.

There are, as you know, Three Degrees of Masonry. These are conferred only at some Communication of the Lodge, either Stated or Called. Visitors are admitted in any Lodge, in any Degree, only with the consent of the Worshipful Master. It follows, naturally, that a Member may vote on any matter only in his own Lodge.

A man cannot petition for the Degrees unless he has resided in the State for twelve months, and in the Jurisdiction of the Lodge for six months; there are certain exceptions to this rule, but I will not go into them here.

A petitioner must sign his own full name to his petition, and satisfactorily answer a list of questions. His petition must also be signed by two Members of the Lodge he petitions.

The Lodge receives this petition at a Stated Communication. It is then referred to an investigation Committee of not less than three Members, who, one month or more thereafter, must return a report in writing. The report of this Committee is solely for the sake of information; after it is made, the Lodge, at a Stated Communication, must Ballot on the petition, and for the petitioner to be elected he must receive a unanimous, favorable Ballot. One Ballot elects for all three Degrees.

Before receiving the Degrees, a petitioner must pay an Initiation Fee as fixed by the Lodge By-Laws. When he becomes a Member, he must pay annual dues, also as fixed by the By-Laws. For special purposes he is also required to pay any assessments, the Lodge may by vote levy upon its Members. These fees, dues, and assessments comprise the principal source of income to a Lodge, though in addition to them the Lodge may receive income from endowments and other similar sources. For each candidate Raised, the Lodge must pay annual per capita fees to Grand Lodge.

Such, in briefest outline, and to the extent to which you can now understand it, is the machinery and form of organization of a regular Masonic Lodge. It is, however, an outline only and can convey to you but a slight hint of its rich life and manifold activities as a Lodge Member knows them. We trust that you will enjoy the privileges of Membership that are yours, and we are confident that this enjoyment will exceed all your expectations.