

To Exist – Or To Live

A matter of Lodge Leadership

Unknown

This Short Talk Bulletin has been adapted from a pamphlet, issued by the Masonic Service Committee of the Grand Lodge of Iowa, which was written by the late M. W. Brother Burton H. Saxton, P.G.M. We appreciate the permission of the Grand Lodge of Iowa in allowing us to present this "good and wholesome instruction."

The insistent demand for leadership is a wholesome sign; it means not only that the value of constructive work is admitted, but that it must be planned and directed by individuals who are themselves not merely willing to cooperate, but who have the ability, through the cooperation they inspire in others, to produce results.

The votes which elect a Master speak the confidence of the Brethren in his leadership – a responsibility that should not rest lightly upon his shoulders, and will not, if these Brethren have made no mistake in their estimate. The Master, perhaps above all others, should take counsel of this: "To see how little we can do, is to exist; to see how much we can do, is to live." In a large measure his officers should share his concern to adhere closely to this challenging principle.

Adequate leadership is needed in every lodge, regardless of size or age, for the demands of lodge administration are varied and exacting. It is recognized, of course, that many of these duties are cared for by officers other than the Master, but nevertheless he is the executive head of the lodge and must therefore accept final responsibility.

We may say that a broad definition of lodge administration includes these seven major divisions: Finances, Ritual, Masonic Education and Inspiration, Proper Assimilation of New Members, Conservation of Membership, Fraternal Welfare and Relief, and Relations with Grand Lodge. It should be helpful to consider each of these separately.

FINANCES

This department of lodge administration concerns mainly income and disbursements, assets and liabilities.

The sources of the lodge's income are usually limited to fees and dues, and, in certain cases, rent on its commercial property, and interest on savings deposits or securities.

From the net amount of the fees (total collected less that portion allotted to Grand Lodge) it would seem wise to provide as far as possible a reserve for emergencies and for relief. If there is an outstanding debt (mortgage or other), a sinking fund should be established for its retirement and current interest payments thereon. Infrequent petitions may make this difficult, but in principle it is a sound method and should be observed as closely as possible.

The collection of dues presents a more complex problem, and the requirements in relation thereto should be strictly followed. Besides collection, there are the matters of remission of dues when justified, and of suspension for non-payment. The only basis for remission of dues usually recognized, is actual inability to pay. Suspension for nonpayment should be enforced when failure to pay arises from any other cause than the one justifying remission. This rule is of benefit not only to the lodge, which is thus relieved of paying Grand Lodge dues by reason of the suspension, but also to the brother himself, as his accumulated debt to the lodge might otherwise be difficult to meet at a later date.

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that the Grand Lodge portions of both dues and fees should be segregated and held as trust funds, since their actual ownership is in the Grand Lodge. In effect, the subordinate lodge has merely collected these funds for the Grand Lodge, and under no circumstances should it use them for its own purposes. Serious complications have sometimes arisen because of ignorance of or indifference to this important distinction.

Disbursements affect two groups of charges: fixed and variable. Under fixed charges (besides Grand Lodge dues and its portion of the fees) are found such items as rent, taxes, interest, insurance, repairs, salaries, continuing relief cases, and the transfer of approved amounts to reserve or sinking funds. The variable charges may be classified as emergency relief cases, equipment and supplies, entertainment, printing, postage, and miscellaneous.

Sound business methods call for the annual preparation of a budget and rigid adherence thereto. The fixed charges may be closely known in advance, and past experience should be a fairly safe guide in estimating those expenses which are variable. The possibility of new or emergency relief cases presents a difficulty, but any excess over a reasonable estimate might be drawn from the reserve already mentioned. A budget has the advantage of requiring advance planning, fixing limitations to variable charges, and supporting objections to unwise or impulsive motions to incur expenses which were not anticipated. If a lodge finds that expenses exceed income, with no immediate relief in sight, it should either economize or increase its dues – there is no other alternative if it is to remain solvent.

One other vitally important financial requirement of efficient lodge administration is the annual audit of the accounts of both Secretary and Treasurer. The audit report should go into the situation thoroughly, taking nothing for granted, giving the facts, favorable or otherwise, as they

find them. If justifiable adverse criticism is made, steps should at once be taken to correct the fault. Dishonesty is rarely found, but carelessness occasionally is present, sometimes working to the disadvantage of the lodge, and should not be further tolerated.

When any matter of unusual importance arises, such as purchase or sale of real estate, negotiating a loan, financing the improvement or erection of a hall or Temple, expert counsel should of course be consulted; otherwise mistakes are easily made – and are usually expensive.

RITUAL

Since the Ritual is so vital a part of Masonry, it is imperative that the officers become competent in its use if the candidate is to realize as he should the significance of the ceremonies in which he participates. His mind is (or should be) alert to every word, for what he is about to receive lies entirely outside his past experience. If certain officers have done their duty, he is not disturbed by anticipation of anything not consistent with the dignity and solemnity of the degrees; he is keenly sensitive to impressions, and they can easily be made unfavorable by hesitant, uncertain, expressionless, or stilted rendition of the Ritual. It should be exact, for there is only one right way, and A proper pride will insist on precision. Deliberate and effective expression will serve to interpret to the candidate much that otherwise might be confusing. It is quite obvious that this calls for understanding on the part of the officers themselves.

MASONIC EDUCATION AND INSPIRATION

The quality of our Masonry cannot rise above the level of our thinking, and our thinking is not likely to rise above the level of what we know.

Since any study of Masonry must be purely voluntary, the least that can be done for those who display any interest whatever is to make available authentic material, with counsel as to its selection and use. Admitting the voluntary nature of any such study, be it light and incidental or serious and sustained, all possible encouragement should be given to make at least a beginning, trusting to the appeal of the subject in due course to plead its own cause.

To speak of the study of Masonry is to speak of unlimited possibilities. This, however, should not dismay even the newly made Mason, for he is at liberty to attempt much or little, and to choose whatever subject or subjects he prefers. Our historical background, both Operative and Speculative, is not only one of intense interest, but is necessary to a better understanding of all other phases of Masonry; therefore, regardless of later preferences, it deserves first attention.

Symbolism is another important subject that requires investigation, since it deeply concerns our moral, philosophical, and ethical principles; yet many of our symbols call for interpretations far beyond the brief and obvious definitions commonly given, and to neglect these is to miss much of the essential spirit of Masonry itself.

There are other phases that may be explored with profit:

- (a) the development and spread of Speculative Masonry over the world – for until we realize that the Craft is a world-wide Fraternity we have not sensed the strength and possibilities of its influence;
- (b) religious and political opposition, both here and abroad, past and present;
- (c) Masonry in our own colonies;
- (d) Masonry in the formation of our government;
- (e) a study of the lives of famous men who were Masons;
- (f) the early history of the three degrees;
- (g) how we got our Ritual.

These by no means cover the entire ground, but their study – or even a thoughtful reading of one or more of the best authorities on the various subjects – should greatly deepen one's respect for the institution of which he is a part. If our Craft is worth joining, it is worth understanding; the better the understanding, the greater appreciation, appreciation leads to usefulness, and upon the useful Mason the future of the Fraternity depends.

PROPER ASSIMILATION OF NEW MEMBERS

This is a matter of first importance, but one which, unfortunately, has not always received the attention it deserves. The newly made Mason is an asset – but also a responsibility. It is taken for granted that the degrees have been conferred impressively and that he has had simple help in posting. He has been made to feel completely at home in this new relationship, and has already sensed a fraternal spirit new to his experience.

But his actual knowledge of Masonry is at best very limited; rather let it be called an impression. When he became a Master Mason, he crossed the frontier of what was, in a large sense, an undiscovered country. He has entered into what should be regarded as a life relationship – a serious step in any case. The remote beginnings of Masonry, its stability through the centuries, is spread over the civilized world, its religious and political tolerance, the history of its opposition to tyranny in any form – are all these and more to remain to him a closed book? This question cannot be dismissed lightly if our implied obligation to him is to be fulfilled.

The candidate should be informed of the vast reservoir of Masonic literature available to him through the Masonic Service Association. To encourage him in the use of this collection is to point the way to a greater appreciation of the Fraternity with which he has now become identified. He has been told that "Masonry is a progressive science," but this is meaningless to

the individual unless he shares in its progress. He may have initiative, but direction and counsel are necessary and clearly his right.

The process of assimilation cannot be complete until the new member has been given something to do. Not only does this make him feel that he is a fully "accepted" Mason, but it is to a certain extent a test of his mental attitude as well as of his ability. Even a slight (but early) participation in some activity of the lodge will seem important, or at least welcome, to him, for he is thereby made to realize that he "belongs" – a heartwarming discovery.

CONSERVATION OF MEMBERSHIP

Broadly speaking, a member who was worth getting is surely worth keeping. Some loss is inevitable, aside from deaths; but, if combined losses were steadily to exceed initiations, eventually Masonry would disappear. This theoretical possibility is mentioned only to emphasize the vital importance of conserving what we have, and conserving it to the utmost of our ability. We cannot legally solicit petitions, but we can and should use every legitimate means to avoid even the smallest loss of desirable membership. For example, no worthy brother should be allowed to forfeit his good standing if he is actually unable to pay his dues. His pride may keep him silent, but the Secretary or some other member aware of the difficult situation should be able to satisfy himself of the true state of affairs and recommend remission. There may be borderline cases which should be referred to a committee, and a personal interview will often clear up the matter of delinquent dues when carelessness or indifference accounts for the delay.

It should be presumed that those who have been suspended for nonpayment will, in the course of time, be willing and able to petition for reinstatement. These cases should never be allowed to drift indefinitely, for the longer they remain out of touch with the lodge, the greater the chance of losing them permanently. Carefully planned efforts should be made at intervals to close up the ranks, and experience has shown that surprisingly good results are possible.

The principle of conservation of membership deals also with matters wholly apart from finances. It has to do with the interest of the individual in Masonry itself. In the section devoted to the proper assimilation of new members, the importance of giving them something to do was strongly emphasized. This sound principle should be applied with equal care to those older brethren – that is, older in point of membership – who have no official duties and perhaps no place on active committees. The problem of attendance is constant, and bears some relation to conservation; it is reasonable to suppose that members who are given a chance to be directly useful in lodge affairs will take more interest, and that interest will impel attendance; furthermore, a member whose interest is sustained by lodge activities in which he has even a small part is likely to value his good standing more highly than if nothing is expected of him.

The Master has heard time and again that one of his duties is to "set the Craft at work." He must, of course, decide what should be attempted in his particular lodge. It is presumed that he has had some official responsibility prior to his advancement to the East, and that he has profited both by observation and experience. He is likewise familiar with the diversity of interests and capabilities of many of his brethren. Given these advantages, plus some definite ideas of what needs to be done (and anything which will benefit the lodge is a need), he is ready to set the machinery in motion.

The newly elected Master is soon conscious of the fact that the responsibility of leadership, heretofore viewed from some other station in the lodge, is a reality which he, himself, must meet and discharge – and with credit, if he is to justify the confidence of his brethren.

The diversity of interests always present in any group must be recognized. This will point the necessity of diversified types of meetings if satisfactory attendance and cooperation are to be secured. This variety is wholesome. Monotony is deadly – and it may safely be attributed to lack of initiative, or to insistence on or restriction to some one activity in which only a few may be interested, or to a sadly inadequate understanding of Masonry itself.

FRATERNAL WELFARE AND RELIEF

While Relief is the second of our three principal tenets, Masonry in no sense guarantees indemnity for physical or financial misfortune. It does, however, impress upon the individual member at the outset of his Masonic career the profoundly important principle of Charity. While this obligation is accepted individually, it is clear that some well-defined plan must be adopted by the membership as a whole if relief is to be administered effectively.

Few, if any, lodges escape the necessity of contributing funds for the relief of unfortunate brethren or their dependents. It should be remembered that such relief is primarily the responsibility of the lodge, and that the Grand Lodge Charity Fund should not be called on for help unless or until the lodge has exhausted its own available resources.

The sympathetic and the practical should be equally blended in the approach to all such cases. Moreover, the term "Charity," as Masons use it, is not limited to emergencies that simply require immediate food, shelter, or clothing; it embraces continuing relief when necessary, as in event of serious accident or illness; it may even include certain welfare work, rehabilitation of families, supervision or at least kindly counsel in the problems of education of minor children, and assistance in finding employment. It should not be forgotten that the knowledge of sincere interest on the part of his brethren is cheering and stabilizing to the one who is facing grave difficulties. This interest should be made very plain to him, for an encouraging word is often powerful in its effect. While on this subject, it is suggested that not all the anxieties of our brethren are financial, and that a tactful expression of genuine concern for his welfare may be gratefully remembered long after you have forgotten the incident.

RELATIONS WITH GRAND LODGE

Grand Lodge is usually referred to as an event – the Annual Communication – rather than as an organization which functions steadily throughout the year; the latter sense is the one in which it is here considered.

Because of the many points of contact with Grand Lodge, both Master and Secretary should become familiar with the Code – at least with all those portions relating to lodge administration. No car owner would for a moment consider starting on an unfamiliar tour of the country without a road map; nor, having it, would he fail to consult it – in advance – at every point of uncertainty. This very simple and obvious principle applies, especially, to the Master and Secretary in the conduct of their several duties. "The Book of Constitutions you are to search at all times" – a sentence from the ceremony of installation of the Master, and a significant one.

There are two Grand Lodge officers with whom the Craft is frequently in contact: the Grand Master and the Grand Secretary. The former presides over the Grand Lodge at its Annual Communication, and also (in person or by duly appointed representative) at special communications, such as dedications, corner-stone layings, constituting newly chartered lodges, funerals, and any other occasions wholly under the supervision of Grand Lodge. He issues dispensations for the formation of new lodges. Upon request, he renders opinions for administrative guidance of the Craft, and decisions on points at issue – the latter subject to later review by the Committee on Masonic Jurisprudence in most jurisdictions. With certain exceptions, he appoints all committees, boards, and non-elective officers. He may arrest the jewel of any lodge officer, or the charter of any lodge. He may "convene, open, preside in, inspect, and close any lodge in the Grand Jurisdiction, and require conformity to Masonic law and usage. " He is "to exercise and discharge the executive functions of the Grand Lodge when it is not in session" is an indication of his responsibility and authority.

There is much correspondence and consultation with the Grand Secretary during the course of the year, yet in many cases of legal nature such inquiries would often be unnecessary if the Master or Secretary would consult the Code instead (this likewise applies to similar questions sent the Grand Master).

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