

"Diligent Inquiry"

(Candidate Investigation)

Unknown

The various Codes, Constitutions, Rules, Regulations and By-Laws of Masonic Grand Lodges usually speak in general terms regarding the duties, appointment and reporting of Investigating Committees. All too frequently, Brethren assigned to these Committees treat the matter lightly or with a routine attitude.

A number of Grand Masters in reporting upon the "state of the Craft" in their Jurisdictions have expressed doubts and concerns regarding the effectiveness of some Investigating Committees.

More than forty-five years ago, Brother Lewis L. Martinson of Shawmut Lodge, Boston, Massachusetts, in a report to his lodge, gave more detailed instructions. We are pleased to share them with you: The object of this paper is to remind the members of this lodge that the investigators' moral liability is great and superficial investigation conducive to evil. By the exercise of common sense, fearlessness, and above all, thoroughness, no man need pass our portals to cause us subsequent regret.

Members should ever be on the alert, and at all times co-operate with the officers and members of the investigating committees. The difficulties that surround a metropolitan lodge in the selection of the candidates are numerous. Do not add to them by carelessly proposing men whose fitness can be questioned. In conducting these investigations you should be as rigid as you would were the applicant seeking admission to your home, instead of to your lodge. Masonry is no reformatory, neither can we build stately and superb structures out of tissue paper and on quick-sand foundations. The applicant is a petitioner; he is asking something of Masonry. Masonry, therefore, has an absolute right to know all about him before it shall extend to him its privileges. Do not be timid; do not fear to tread upon his corns; but get the information and thus discharge honorably, as a Mason, the duty which you have assumed through which your Lodge will be enabled to extend the glad hand of fellowship to clean, upright men and avoid marring the beauty of the Temple with soiled, morally leprous material. Remember also, that when once admitted within our tiled recesses you cannot avoid this applicant and draw your cloak about you. You must be as ready and willing to treat him as a Brother, as you are the brother related to you by blood ties, residing beneath your home roof.

For this reason it is within your province to ask information which might otherwise be considered very personal, to propound questions which in any other connection would be termed impertinent .

Of the applicant you should also ascertain: How long has he been acquainted personally with his proposer? How long has he resided within the Jurisdiction of this Lodge? Why does he desire to become a Freemason? What is his conception of the Masonic institution? What does he think it is, and why, in his opinion do Masons congregate and what do they endeavor to accomplish by their associations one with the other?

Does he understand that Masonry is not a financial institution and that no financial returns are to be expected by either the applicant or his family?

Is he of a charitable disposition? Does he contribute financially to charitable causes as far as his ability permits? Is he charitable in thought and action toward his fellowmen or is he bigoted and prejudiced, considering all men in error who do not view life through his particular line of vision?

What is his financial standing? Is he prompt in meeting his bills; is he considered an A-1 man to have business dealings with? Does he understand that there are certain yearly dues required from each member, and will he promptly meet them and any other obligations of a similar nature?

Do his appearance and surroundings indicate that he can financially afford the degrees of Masonry? No man should deprive himself or his family of necessities that he may enjoy the degrees of Masonry. We desire to add to our working force; do not handicap us with an added burden.

What provisions has he made for his family and himself in event of disability or death? Does his family concur in his desire to become a Freemason? Do you consider him a man who will attend with reasonable regularity upon the communications of the Lodge, and a man who will endeavor to educate and better himself by a more extensive study of Masonry than that contained in the lectures of The Three Degrees?

Does he impress you as being one who will LIVE Masonry, who will endeavor to bring into actual practice the tenets of our profession?

Is he a citizen of the United States? Is his desire to become a Freemason based on the fact that some of his relatives have been, or are, Masons?

Does he consider Masonry merely as a social organization and does he wish to become connected with it merely that he may have the social fellowship connected with it, or has he a sincere desire to become a Mason that he may help himself and help others?

Does the applicant sincerely reverence the Supreme Being and accord Him the glory of the Divine Truths?

This line of questioning, my Brethren, is merely suggestive and is very general. Circumstances alter cases and while each question might be appropriate on many occasions, they might likewise be unwise in other instances. They are suggested merely to impress upon you the necessity of thoroughness in your work. No set of questions can be compiled which can be followed literally in every case. The nature of the case will suggest to you what information you must require, but be certain that you secure enough that you may speak with certainty and emphasis upon the case. Let not the finger of shame or ridicule be pointed against our noble institution because you have been slack in your work. You will probably not be called upon to perform this service more than once in a Masonic year; surely it is not asking too much in that one case each year you expend some real energy and thought and give liberally of your time, not only for the protection of Masonry, and yourself, but also for the preparing and protection of the applicant.

The applicant can doubtless refer you to men of standing who can furnish reliable information regarding him. Those references need not necessarily be Masons; in fact, it is well to consult with men who are not Masons, for often they are more open in their expression of opinions. Do not be content with a list of names furnished by the applicant, but by your own efforts find others who know the applicant. It is not reasonable to suppose that the applicant will not refer you to any but those whom he believes will give him a "good send-off." You may find his next door neighbor, his grocer, or the man who works alongside of him, a much better source of information. It is well, however, not to indicate to profanes the reason for your inquiries as there may be those among them who are not favorable to our institution and harm might be worked the applicant were it known to these people that he entertained Masonic ambitions.

You are given one month for your investigation. If more is required, the Master will gladly grant it, provided, of course, you ask for it.

You should not procrastinate, thereby seriously interfering with the work of the Lodge. When doubts remain as in the applicant's fitness, after strict examination has been held, remember, Brethren, the Lodge always should derive the benefit of them.

In conclusion, Brethren, let me remind you most emphatically that Masonry is great and good just to the degree that its individual members are. We are a strong body, we need not of necessity accept any and all kinds of material, we have the privilege of choosing and selecting. By the admission of unsuitable material you mar a beautiful edifice which you have promised to keep clean. We do not expect perfect men by any means, but we do insist on men who have already laid a foundation upon which we may build, men who are not decayed by the wrong living of years, men who have character and intellect sufficient to grasp the richness of the moral banquet which Masonry spreads before them.

Let us have clean men. We do not want the libertine, the man of loose habits or unclean tongue .

The man who deals lightly with virtues and whose eyes do not turn with reverence to God cannot be made a perfect ashlar. Symbols, lessons and obligations to him are as water on a duck's back. Masonry cannot reform him and he will be a blight to Masonry.

Investigate east and west, north and south, at home and abroad, from friend and foe, by day and night – but investigate.

Look well to our portals; let no unworthy foot cross the threshold.

STB - May 1983