

Mother Lodge

Unknown

The tenderest of Masonic affections cling around this phrase; men away from home have a longing for their Mother Lodge, indefinable in words, as ethereal as a flower-scent, as actual as the good standing cards they carry in their pockets.

But what is this that men call Mother Lodge? Ritualistically, a Lodge is a legal number of brethren, assembled with a Charter, or Warrant of Constitution, and the Three Great Lights of Masonry properly arranged. Legally, it is all the brethren whose names are carried on the rolls, formed into an organization by recognition from the Grand Lodge which gave them -or those they succeeded - life as a part of the Grand Lodge family of Lodges. Physically, a Lodge seems, to the brethren who compose it, to be the room in the Temple in which they meet. Yet none of these definitions satisfy the thoughtful as complete.

While a Charter, or Warrant of Constitution, and the Three Great Lights are necessary for holding a Lodge, the destruction of the Charter, the loss of the Three Great Lights does not destroy the Lodge. Duplicate Charters may be issued; new Great Lights may be obtained... Read the words of Brother J.C. Stewart, Cannongate Kilwinning Lodge No.2, Edinburg, Scotland:

Time's ravages does Time repair,
Time's deepest wounds are healed by Time;
The Master passes from the chair,
The Warden to the Chair doth climb.
Master and Warden soon are gone,
The Lodge lives on, The Lodge lives on!

The torch of light is handed down
The ages that so swiftly flee;
Out of our frailty comes renown
And life from our mortality;
The pomps of yesteryear are gone,
The Lodge lives on, the Lodge lives on!

The Lodge cannot be "only" the brethren who compose it, as these continually change. A brother may be removed from the vicinity in which his Mother Lodge meets, remain away fifty

years, and return to find every brother he knew when he first saw Masonic Light, gone to the Grand Lodge Above. Yet, his Mother Lodge remains.

The Lodge cannot be “only” the room in which meetings are held. Temples are temporary, Lodges move from room to room, sometimes from town to town, or even State to State. California Lodge No. 13, District of Columbia, moved to California in 1849, and became California Lodge No.1 in the Grand Lodge of that State; many Army Lodges have traveled far. Yet these are still Mother Lodges to those brethren who are their sons.

The difficulty of defining just what we so love as our Mother Lodge is increased by the word “Lodge” having more than one meaning. The Church is an organized body of worshipers who meet in a church; burn the edifice, the Church remains. Used in this sense the Lodge is that indefinable organization that meets in the lodge room. The word has come down to us from operative days, when workmen erecting a Cathedral built a hut, or lodge, in which to keep the plans, meet and talk over the work, use as a recreation hall in bad weather, even to sleep in. “Lodge” is a legitimate descendent of the good old Anglo- Saxon word “logian” meaning “to dwell.” Spelled “logge” it is mentioned in our oldest document, the Regius Poem, 1390.

When the word means an organized body of Freemasons, it is in contradiction to a “Chapter” of Royal Arch Masons, a “Council” of Cryptic Masons, a “Consistory” of Scottish Rite Masons, a “Commandery” of Knights Templar.

Occasionally the Lodge is a piece of furniture. In the beautiful ceremonies of consecration, Dedication and Constitution of a new Lodge, the symbolic corn, wine and oil are sprinkled upon an actual object, representing the Lodge. Usually it is an oblong box, covered with white cloth. This use of an object called “The Lodge,” to visualize the formation of the new organization, is very old; Preston speaks of it in his “Illustrations of Masonry,” first edition. 1772, as follows:

“The Grand Master, attended by his Officers, and some dignified Clergymen, form themselves in order around the Lodge, in the center; and, all devoutly kneeling, the preparatory prayer is rehearsed. The Chaplain produces his authority, and being properly assisted proceeds to consecrate. Solemn music strikes up, and the necessary preparations are made. The first clause of the consecration prayer is rehearsed, all devoutly kneeling; and the response is made, Glory to God on High. Incense is scattered over the Lodge and the Grand Honors of Masonry are given.”

The Mother Lodges of all men now living are Lodges of Master Masons. They may, indeed, be “open on the First Degree” or “called off to the Second Degree” but, according to Mackey, in these modern times no “Lodge of Entered Apprentices” or a “Lodge of Fellowcrafts” can exist.

A Charter or Warrant which empowers them to work as a Lodge is given to a certain number of “Master Masons.” No Lodge can work without a Master or Wardens. A Master and his Wardens “must” be Master Masons. All Lodges, then, are Lodges of Master Masons. The phrase often

written in lodge minutes: “The Lodge of Master Masons was closed and a Lodge of Entered Apprentices opened” cannot be a statement of fact. When a Lodge of Master Masons is “closed,” there is an end to the work of the evening. As a matter of fact the Lodge is “not closed” when “work” is to be done on either of the first two degrees; it is reopened “on the Entered Apprentice (or Fellowcraft) degree” either by actual ceremony, or “calling off to” or “calling on to” the appropriate degree.

Many modern Masonic jurists dispute this, and reference is made in more than one Book of Constitutions and Code to “opening a Lodge of Entered Apprentices,” as for a corner stone laying. The general practice of Grand Lodges, however, regardless of how their laws are worded, is to open first on the Master Mason’s Degree, and then either re-open, or “dispense with labor on the Master Mason’s Degree to call to labor on the entered Apprentice’s Degree.”

In Operative days, Lodges were composed of Fellows of the Craft. Attached were a certain number of Apprentices who became “Entered” when they passed the novate and were enrolled on the books of the Lodge. At the heads of such Lodges were Master Masons - architects and planners of great buildings. These received and judged the “Master’s Piece” made by Entered Apprentices who had served their seven years and who desired to become Fellows.

At the revival of Masonry in its Speculative form in the first Grand Lodge (1717) Lodges worked only the Entered Apprentice’s Degree. The Fellowcraft Degree and the “Master’s Part” were conferred only in Grand Lodge. At that time all Lodges could truly be called Lodges of Entered Apprentices,” from which date our custom of laying corner- stones while open in the First Degree. Shortly after the formation of the Mother Grand Lodge, the degrees were written into their present forms by Anderson and Desaugliers and, later, Preston. All Lodges were then given the right to confer all three degrees. Since that time - which also saw the beginning the practice of issuing Warrants, - all Masonic Lodges have been made up of Master Masons. Lodges are created by Grand Lodge. Seven or more brethren who desire to form a new Lodge petition the Grand Master; if he so desires he issues a Dispensation to hold a Lodge. A Lodge U.D. can make Masons, but do little else, and its Dispensation lasts only until Grand Lodge meets, when it may or may not grant a Warrant to the U.D. Lodge to be a regular Lodge. Even after the granting of the Charter, or Warrant of Constitution, the Lodge is not “duly constituted” and does not become so until the Grand Master (or a brother he deputizes for the purpose) and Grand Officers (or their representatives) perform the ceremonies of Consecration, Dedication and constitution.

This ancient ceremony differs as to ritual in the several Jurisdictions, but the intent is the same in all, and the general form very similar. Proceedings are opened with a prayer. The Dedication is accomplished when the Grand Officers pour upon the piece of furniture representing “The Lodge,” the “corn of nourishment, the wine of refreshment and the oil of joy.”

Consecration is accomplished by a prayer to the Great Architect, and Constitution by pronouncement from the Grand Master. Comparatively few brethren have an opportunity to see this ceremony; all should read it in the Code, Ahiman Rezon or Book of Constitutions of the Grand Lodge.

The Entered Apprentice is informed that the form of the lodge is that of an “oblong square.” The apparently contradictory words come from an antiquity to which the memory of man runneth not. The “oblong square” is the shape which our ancient progenitors imagined the world to be, probably because the swing of the sun across the sky was longer from east to west than its movement from north to south between winter and summer. Masonically, the words are not contradictory, since the “oblong” is formed of four squares, no less so that one leg of each is longer than the other. The Pythagorean Problem (forty seventh problem of Euclid) is usually, and always more beautifully demonstrated with a square which has one leg longer than the other, than with the familiar Master’s square with legs of equal length.

To us the Lodge is a symbol of the world, just as the “oblong square” symbolized the shape of the world to our ancient brethren.

Ritualistically, a Lodge has the “vast proportions” of extending indefinitely “from East to West” stretching “from earth to heaven,” encompassing both center and circumference. It is universal; not located necessarily in one spot, confined to one room, one Temple, one city. In San Francisco a New York brother is still a member of his Mother Lodge; in China the visitor to Peking Lodge (Massachusetts dispensation) is still a member of his Boston Lodge. Precious the thought to many a wanderer that, wherever he is, there also is a bit of his Mother Lodge.

Extending the idea of the universality of the Lodge is its covering, the clouded canopy. Our ancient brethren, holding their meetings on high hills and low vales, knew no other roof. Jacob envisioned his ladder from earth to heaven, the rungs of which we name with the most precious teachings which come from the Lodge - faith, hope and charity. Truly, the brother in a far city who thinks lovingly of his Mother Lodge has reason to carry her sacredly in his heart, since size and extent, covering and lessons, are so great.

Nor need for any sojourning brother, even if he be where there is no Lodge for him to visit, to be without those appurtenances of every Lodge - the furniture, the lights and the jewels. Great Lights are to be found the world over - in every hotel room is a Gideon Bible. Square and Compasses hang from millions of watch chains, are on countless rings, and their images are in the minds of every Freemason. He may keep three Lesser Lights burning in his heart, though years may pass before he sees them around the Altar of his Mother Lodge; and as for Ashlars, the Trestlboard, Square, Level and Plumb; he is a poor Freemason indeed who does not keep them in his memory, for use in everyday life.

“My Mother Lodge! What tenderest associations cling about the phrase; with what veneration do loving Freemasons speak of “Old Number 17” or “The Old Lodge” with “old” as a term of

endearment. With what pride do we think of the achievements of our Mother Lodge; the brethren who went forth from her to war, the money she has given to the Masonic Home, the square work she has done, the good men and true she has selected to be her sons, the good times she has supplied in innocent gaiety for her children, her tender care of the sick, feeble and helpless; her comforting in grief those who have loved and lost.”

(“Foreign Countries”) Tenderest of sentiments, loveliest of memories, dearest of associations cling about the Mother Lodge. While men cherish so much on the intangibles of the hidden land of the spirit, earthy, none need fear that Freemasonry will pass away!

STB – January 1933