

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE MARK

Brethren,

It would be tempting to entitle this talk "The Constitutions of Mark Masonry" but I was deterred on two grounds. First I can speak only at second hand - a good second hand having been corresponding with Grand Lodge and Provincial Grand Lodges over a period of 8 years, over their theory and and practice.

Our rules, the act of establishment associated with the ceremony of Constitution of new Lodges, and in the more distant past, the actual physical authority by which power was conveyed to an individual Freemason or to a group desirous of working corporately, i.e. as a Lodge, have all precluded that title. However the "Government of the Mark Degree including the Royal Ark Mariner" is a title that all should be able to understand even if, as I suspect, it does not rate very high in terms of popular interest.

Looked at from the Constitutional point of view like most other Degrees the Mark and R.A.M. Degrees consists of three tiers in England which have followed a similar system to the Craft. These tiers are the Private Lodges, Provincial and District Grand Lodges, and the Grand Lodge. I propose to deal with each of them in that order.

The Lodge is the basic, as indeed it is the oldest organisation in Mark Masonry, and it should not be forgotten when we come to consider the power of authority of the higher bodies that at least up to 1856 Lodges were entirely self governing, though under other Constitutions the degree was worked as part of other Degrees.

The election of the Master by the members is universal practice. Once elected and Installed, he is responsible for his Lodge's behaviour and still more for its good name. But brethren how does he stand in actual power. He still has the last word in the appointment of Officers other than the Treasurer and Tyler. It would however be a foolhardy Master elect who did not go through some process of consultation, with senior members, particularly if changes are envisaged. The surest route to an unhappy year, generally an unproductive year, is to disregard, and to show that this is done intentionally, the advice of the Lodge's elder statesmen. But this said, we must ask ourselves what power and authority these elders have. It is not obligatory to have a Lodge Committee, its prime function, if authorised and appointed at all, is to consider and report on proposals for membership. Other matters may be specifically referred to it for consideration and reported on within defined limits; but no committee can be invested with any general executive powers. From time to time one hears of agitation from less senior and probably less experienced members.

Having doubts as to these two being obsolete sources of Constitutional

power, and being aware votes in open Lodge are infrequently split down the middle of the membership, we should examine the powers of the Master in the light of the limitations imposed on him. We have already seen that his power of appointment of Officers though theoretically absolute, is in fact limited by the need to carry the Past Masters and Lodge Committee with him.

Through the Secretary the Master summons the Lodge regular meeting, but he is not a free agent and there is no power to cancel a meeting, nor is he permitted to summon an emergency meeting without authority from above.

From the point of view of legislation, neither the Master nor the Lodge has absolute authority, since no By-Law or amendment can be effected until it has been approved by higher authority. The only exception being the alteration in Annual Dues if stated in the By-Laws. In any case the Grand Masters approval would not be given to any By-Law or amendment which was repugnant to the Book of Constitutions.

In the matter of internal discipline a Lodge is free to exclude one of its members "for sufficient cause" provided it goes the right way about it.

A Lodge has indeed much of the semblance of a democracy with one man one vote on all matters of domestic concern, but it is the shadow rather than the substance, since it is governed not only by the By-Laws, which we have seen are subject to outside control, but also by the Book of Constitutions itself and by the abundance of case law arising from decisions of Grand Lodge itself.

What has been expressed so far may be taken as applying with but little variation to all Lodges, but when we pass on to the second tier of government, that of Provincial Grand Lodges, it would be rash to treat all as cast in one mould.

It is obvious that with strengths varying in Provinces there are great varieties in methods of internal administration and government, but there are some basic principals which apply to both great and small. The Provincial Grand Master is appointed by the Grand Master by patent for a period of up to five years. Like other Grand Officers except for the Grand Treasurer, and he has his prescribed place in the Grand Officers table of precedence. After the Installation (or till then as Provincial Grand Master designate he has no power except to summon a Provincial Grand Lodge Meeting for his Installation) he is in full control. He will have been asked to appoint or confirm the existing appointment of Officers and to confirm with his approval the By-Laws of his Province. Henceforward he is in a position of great power and responsibility; he is the fountain of honour within his Province, and to a numerically lesser but practically more important extent, it will be only by his recommendation that members of his Province as such have their names submitted to the Grand Master for ultimate honour of Grand Rank. He has very considerable powers of Masonic discipline subject only to the right of appeal from his decision to the Grand Lodge. His effective power however lies in his largely unwritten

'auctoritas': this is not quite the same as 'authority' and has no precise equivalent in English. It means that, because they trust him, his brethren will do what they believe that he wants them to do, will follow his lead, and take his personal advice much as if it had constitutional force.

The Provincial Grand Master may appoint a Deputy and even an assistant Provincial Grand Master, the latter depending on the number of Lodges in the Province, by patent. This is on an Annual basis, as many will have notice at the Provincial Meeting he asks his Deputy to continue in Office. It is a Provincial Appointment and therefore the Provincial Grand Master may terminate the Patent when he so desires.

In this patent it states that he will act in the absence of the Provincial Grand Master. Here this is not quite so, for in the case of the death or retirement of the Provincial Grand Master, the Deputy Provincial Grand Master has no authority until he receives a letter stating that he is Deputy in Charge, from the Grand Secretary.

In order to assist the Provincial Grand Master, a form of bodies or body is required and what form this takes rests with the Provincial Grand Master. In the case of this Province it takes the form of the 'Provincial General Purposes Committee' on which all Lodges of the Province are represented in accordance with the Provincial By-Laws. This Committee along with the Provincial Charity Committee formulates and recommends alterations of By-Laws, Annual dues and the Charity giving of the Province. Routine matters of administration are referred to it by the Provincial Grand Master and the Provincial Grand Secretary. It should be emphasised that its function is mainly consultative, and, if it does recommend some course of action to the Provincial Grand Lodge, it is more than likely that it is echoing the views of others.

It will be clear that the composition of a Provincial Grand Lodge; is essentially a body of qualified individuals, who are not in the strict sense representatives or delegates of their Lodges. The ordinary Mark Master Mason, though encouraged to be present, is there as a courtesy and has neither voice or vote in the proceedings.

WE should ask ourselves what then is the function of Provincial Grand Lodge: in most cases it meets annually and the main, or at any rate the longest item of business is the appointment and investiture of Officers. In respect of the conferment of honours the power of the Provincial Grand Master is limited.

It would appear, therefore, that of the powers which exist at this immediate level there lie with with the Provincial Grand Master discipline with which Provincial Grand Lodge has nothing to do, conferment of honours, and presiding over meetings which he alone summons. The Provincial Grand Lodge decides what taxation to impose, and what by-laws to lay down. Neither of them can establish a new lodge or bring to final conclusion the activities of an existing one. Neither, therefore, can claim absolute or unfettered power; The Book of Constitutions controls actions of both, while within the meetings of the Provincial Grand Lodge those present as members could if feelings were sufficiently

aroused or predilections antagonised, vote down any recommendations put to it.

In the case of Grand lodge full details of their regulations are contained in the Book of Constitutions as are those for the Grand Masters Royal Ark Council.

The General Board consists of the Grand Master down to Wardens, The Grand Treasurer, The Grand D.C., Grand Inspector of Works the Deputy Grand Registrar, also the President and the Vice President. In addition there are 6 brethren appointed by the Grand Master and five elected by Grand Lodge, whose names have been put forward and of course the Grand Secretary.

Members of the General Board who are holders of Royal Ark Mariner Grand Rank are appointed to the Grand Master's Royal Ark Council. The Appeals court consists of 6 members and is independant of the General Board. In addition there are six members who are elected for three years, two retiring every year. The Grand Secretary is a member of all these Committees. In order that all Lodges are kept informed, the Mark and R.A.M. Degree is administered by the Assistant Grand Secretary who works direct to the Grand Secretary. They will only communicate with Provinces via the Provincial Grand Secretary and unless it is a personal matter concerning the Provincial Grand Master. As the Grand Secretary clearly states to his Provincial Secretaries they are the gate way to the Provinces as he is to Grand Lodge. In a similar way the Provincial Grand Secretary is the gateway to the Lodges and for the Lodges back to the Province or Grand Lodge. As the Grand Master relies on his Grand Secretary, so the Provincial Grand Master relies on his Provincial Secretary, and nothing travels or should not travel either way than through the Provincial Grand Secretary. This gives time for the Provincial Secretary to check with the book of Constitutions the answer to any query a Lodge or brother may have. To try and question the Provincial Grand Master or his Deputy or the Grand Secretary in not on, and questions or queries should be in writing. This then puts both the question and answer in writing for the records, and avoids upsets by different brethren may be receiving different answers and so causing embarrassment to the R.W. Provincial Grand Master and his Deputy, if on checking with the Provincial Grand Secretary the answer to the question was in some cases contrary to the B. of C.

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