

Some observations on Craft Masonry.

This will be, as suggested, a random meandering of thoughts.

Let us begin before the beginning and consider the essential qualifications for candidature -- "Just, upright and free men, of mature age, sound judgement and strict morals." One must have a good knowledge of a man, not merely a passing acquaintance, to be sure that he fulfils all these conditions. It must be remembered that a sponsor takes on a very great responsibility when he backs a candidate. Today in Britain there are no bondmen, but the word "free" may be taken to mean free from addictive vices such as alcoholism, drugs, compulsive betting, habitual foul language etc. I do not suggest that only saints are fit candidates but that among sinners, as we all are, we must be selective. Integrity and justice follow from sound judgement and strict morals. In my view the crucial test is "strict morals". Mature age is laid down for us as 21 or over, but it is doubtful whether it is wise to recommend a potential candidate at 21. Not all of us know our own minds at 21 and very few are in a position at that age to take on the responsibilities of Freemasonry as well as those of a potential husband and parent. I should say that a good age would be between 25 and 70. By that time a man is likely to be set on life's course and in a position to know what extra responsibilities he can assume. At a much later age he is likely to find the responsibilities of a Master, and indeed of a past master, taxing his mental capacity. And if he later is honoured by Grand Rank he may find himself too old to discharge the duties implied in setting an example to younger

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brethren.

I think that many of us can think of young men who would make good masons. Some of us feel inhibited from suggesting that they should join the Craft. In my view there is no reason why a Brother should not drop a hint that he would like to see the young man in his Lodge. It is the improper solicitation which is forbidden. I should not regard such a hint as solicitation, far less improper solicitation. Then when the young man makes the approach, there is much information which should be given to him and -- very important-- to his wife or fiancée. Even if he goes no further than the 3 degrees of Craft Masonry his membership will have a great impact on his family life. Even at a minimum it will mean 8 evenings a year and if he does his duty in the Lodge it will mean much more -- Lodge of Instruction, Lodge of Rehearsal, Provincial Grand Lodge, and probably visiting. Also much time will be spent studying the ritual, and I mean studying in the words of the catechism, to read, to mark, to learn and inwardly to digest, to make it part of oneself. He, or rather he and his wife, should be told that certain promises will be required of him and that Freemasonry is very serious, though having many lighter moments. They must know the days of meetings, his bounden duty to attend, the cost in cash -- initiation fee, annual subscription, donation to Charities, regalia and many incidental. If a man cannot afford all these things it is no kindness to him and no service to the Craft to recommend him. He should be told that in return for the discharge of these responsibilities he gains something in the brotherhood which is intangible but of tremendous value. They should be told that Freemasonry is not a religion but is a powerful adjunct to any religion which

acknowledges God. Then he and his wife should be left alone to think it all over until he expresses a wish to proceed, after which he should appear before a committee of installed masters and wardens who can put some pretty searching questions,

Then comes the great day of his initiation. It is of paramount importance that this should be done with great solemnity and dignity and in such a manner that it makes sense to the candidate. In this ceremony he gets his first contact with the Craft, and if it is not done very well indeed it will take many months and many ceremonies to bring home to him the true nature of Freemasonry. Indeed he may lose all interest.

In the initiation ceremony he makes only one promise, albeit among much verbiage, namely Secrecy. But in the charge in the North East and especially in the charge after initiation he gets a brief insight into the principles of the Craft. In my view it is regrettable that the first tracing board is not explained in open Lodge more often. There is so much in it setting forth the tenets of the Craft. I think it should be done at least once in every two years.

In the second degree he renews his promise of secrecy and also vows to adhere to the principles inculcated in the former degree, and this should mean a great deal if the two charges have been put over properly. The second degree tracing board is to my mind an interesting piece of history, but it does not have the inspiration of the first tracing board.

It may be worth noting that in the first degree ceremony the candidate has the lowest escort, the J.D. In the second degree he does a bit better with the S.D. In the third degree he has all the escort available

namely both deacons. Again he promises secrecy and he also vows to practice the specific duties between Masons, namely the five points of Fellowship. He also makes a solemn promise which is too often disregarded to do his best to attend his Lodge regularly; He learns something of the fable of Hiram Abiff, -- I call it a fable because I can find no such authentic history. He learns the substituted secrets of a master mason, the genuine ones having been lost by the murder of the master. I should like here to say a few words about the aspect of the Lodge during the ceremony of "raising". In the V.S.L. we learn of a certain ruler approaching a great teacher and coming by night. Compare the illumination of the Lodge. He was told that a man must be born again and he asked How can that be? must he re-enter his mother's womb? No, he was told, he must be reborn in the spirit. Is this symbolised in the raising of the candidate from a figurative G? But even when a man is raised to the third degree he still is not entrusted with the genuine secrets of a master Mason, only the substituted ones. These genuine secrets are only revealed in the ceremony of exaltation into the Order of the Holy Royal Arch, in which ceremony further duties are imposed on the master mason before he receives the genuine secrets. From then on he can ponder all he has learned and mould his life accordingly, always guided by his conscience.

Now I should like to say a few words about the officers of the Lodge. First the Tyler or outer guard. Often he is not so well off financially as other members, but he is first and foremost a Brother and let us never regard him as anything less. He is the first contact any candidate has with any masonic ritual, and his kindly bearing to a nervous candidate can do much to render him receptive to what is to come.

In a certain Province with which I am acquainted it is customary, on leaving for home to shake hands with the Tyler and to leave a coin in his hand. I consider this to be a horrible practice. The Tyler has a very responsible office and should be paid a dignified fee and not be reduced to accepting surreptitious tips. He is a Brother usually of very wide experience.

Next, the stewards. These important officers have many duties to perform, the first of which is to arrive well before the appointed time, so as to welcome any guest who has arrived before his host. I suppose we have all had the experience of sidelong glances from members when we have visited a Lodge before the arrival of our host. How much more brotherly to be approached with a smile, a handshake, a welcome, a swap of names and a chat by a steward. Stewards should be able to prove a visitor when so requested and to report to the D.C. or the J.W. They should be available for such jobs as fetching extra chairs etc when asked by the D.C. Their duties at the festive board are well known and they should not allow their zeal for hospitality to press anyone to drink more than he wishes.

The inner guard has some few words to say and some actions to take, e.g. salutes, the reception of the candidate etc. He is to check the work of the Tyler and must always satisfy himself that the candidate is in fact properly prepared. I have known an initiate admitted wearing an exposed ring, and on another occasion without the C.T.

The Assistant secretary's job can be a heavy one or he can be of great help to his chief, so gaining the experience which will enable him to carry on if the secretary should for any reason be unavailable. No small task.

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The Organist. I always feel that a ceremony without music is like a picture without colour. How would Turner's sunsets look without colour? But like everything else music can be overdone. It should never obtrude, and the good organist will keep an eye on the ceremony and know when to play and when to stop.

The Almoner. In my view this office should be combined with that of the Charity Representative who should have discretion in disbursing alms as well as the duty of gathering in Charity subscriptions. Here I might say a little about the Charity representative. It is surely his duty to remind the Brethren of the three Grand Principles, Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth. Without relief there can only be very poor Brotherly Love and precious little Truth. I was for many years Charity Representative and I was often disgusted to see a man spend a pound or more at the bar at each meeting and grudge me a fiver for the Charities. I got into terrible hot water for telling a man who was running a Bentley car for pleasure that he could well afford a tenner each year for Charities. I was and still am unrepentant. Brethren, Give freely such sum as you can afford as you averred at your initiation.

Now the Deacons. These officers can ruin a ceremony if they have not made a careful study of the ritual, not only the words but also the actions. I think that a Deacon should be fully conversant with every item of every ceremony. By taking a really firm grip not only of the hand but of the whole arm he can inspire confidence especially to an initiate before his O.E. The prompting of the candidate's replies should be absolutely clear. I remember a J.D. prompting "awilletta or halve it". The poor candidate could not make head or tail of it and was very embarrassed - a thing which should never be inflicted on a

candidate. Conversely, of course a Deacon's work well done will enhance the good work of the Chair. Too often the dialogue at the Wardens' chairs is between the Warden and the Deacon with the candidate trailing. This can easily be avoided if the Warden looks always at the candidate and never at the Deacon, and similarly the Deacon should make his prompts obviously to the candidate. This will make more sense to the candidate who is after all the person most concerned. Again the Deacon must be ready to prompt immediately in reply to "give me that word" before the candidate can blurt it out in full, as I did at my initiation, with a too slow Deacon, to my embarrassment.

The Secretary. I am a secretary and I describe myself as "the chap who makes all the mistakes and blames them on the printer". But seriously the secretary has a great deal of work to do which does not show if done well but sticks out like a sore thumb if not. Out of fellow feeling I ask you to be patient with him.

The Treasurer. I am also a treasurer and I do a lot of work as such but it would be much less if brethren would pay early in the year. The annual subscription has only to be paid once and might just as well be paid when due according to Lodge by-laws. Here again the work does not show but it is absolutely essential.

The Director of Ceremonies, Here much tact is needed to coax officers to pay attention to so many details of ritual which all add up to making the ceremony meaningful to the candidate for whose benefit it is all about after all. But in practice a first class ceremony only comes about if the brethren have had instruction both at Lodge of Instruction over the long period and Lodge of rehearsal over the short.

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If a D.C. has nothing to do during the ceremony I always know he has done all his homework beforehand, and what is more he has got others to do the same. It looks very bad for a D.C. to have to put his spoke in during a ceremony. Who ever heard of a producer interfering in a play on stage.

The Chaplain. A good chaplain can add so much to the whole atmosphere of a Lodge. I well remember a visiting Provincial Grand Master saying to a Chaplain "I like the way you say the prayers." The Chaplain replied "I feel I am privileged to speak directly to the Almighty on behalf of all the Lodge". This is surely the secret of the Chaplain's work. The wardens. During their term of office these important officers have little to do and by now they ought to be entirely familiar with all Craft ceremonies if they have been reasonably assiduous in attending the Lodge of instruction. They still have time to brush up the work in preparation for the Master's Chair.

The Master is the kingpin of the whole Lodge. I am very jealous for the Master's authority to "rule and direct his Lodge". Too often he is the puppet of perhaps the D.C. or the secretary or some past masters. A good master will listen to and weigh up advice from all sides, consult the Constitutions and make his decision in the assurance that the brethren will loyally respect it. In most cases the ultimate decision is his and if anything should go wrong the authorities will first want to know "what was the Master doing?" It is the Master's prerogative to allocate parts of ceremonies, and while he must show himself capable of doing all the work, he will be wise to invite past masters to assist him at each ceremony, e.g. the N.E. corner, the charge after, the S.W. corner and several parts of the third

degree ceremony. Careful planning even before he is installed
ample warning and reminders to individual past masters will
ensure smooth working. I have a personal idea that it is a
good thing to invite a junior member to present the tools at each
meeting. We must never forget that the strength of a Lodge lies in
its tail and if the younger members are made to feel that they have
a chance to participate in the work it will stimulate interest and
banish the feeling that they are to be "seen and not heard". Thus a
Master can keep the interest of all the brethren and make a regular
attendance well worthwhile.

Now a word about the value of a first class ceremony. If a ceremony
is poorly done members lose interest and attendances fall off, with
the result that the principles and tenets of the Craft are not kept
in the forefront of the minds of the members.

I have in mind an Order in Masonry and in a certain "Lodge" the
officer who combines the duties of D.C. and Deacon is so unable
to do his job that the "Lodge" has dwindled to the extent that they
are not able to muster even a team of officers and have to rely on
the goodwill of guests who are anxious not to witness the demise of
the whole "Lodge". I think the only salvation will be for an incoming
"master" to be utterly ruthless and appoint someone else to that
office. The grossly inefficient officer may have his feelings hurt
but that is a small price to pay to save the life of the "Lodge".
Thus it may fall to a master-elect to drop an officer who is either
inefficient or slack in order to keep the lodge healthy. It should
always be remembered that no brother has an inalienable right to
promotion in sequence. If he has done his job, or seriously tried to

do so he will pretty certainly make progress,

Now a few words about the signs which seem to me to be sometimes very sloppily given. While we are not soldiers on the barrack square there is no reason why we should not have enough respect for the symbolism to take care to avoid sloppiness. I can think of D.C.s who when standing to order in the first degree could well be thought to be in the attitude of reverence, a very poor example to the younger brethren.

HERE DEMONSTRATE WITH REMARKS.

Now "from labour to refreshment" If you are not sure where to sit take instruction from the D.C. At grace remember the Chaplain is addressing T.G.A.O.T.U. and stand still and don't talk. Similarly at grace after meat. If you are called on to speak remember the old adage Stand up, speak up and shut up. And I beg of you never tell any story which could be thought questionable. It would be utterly incompatible with the reverence of our ceremonies and a youngster could ask himself Which is genuine Masonry? If this is it, then the ceremonies are so much eyewash and in fact plain blasphemy. It has fallen to my lot as D.C. to take a guest aside after the meal and tell him that such stories are not acceptable and that any such repetition would meet with my immediate gavel and "Thank you Brother, that is enough". I think the word has got around and I now have no such problems and I have the strong support of the lodge. I think that is enough from me and I will conclude with a quotation from one of the further orders in Masonry :- "Let us never forget that we should be the children of humility, and so order our lives

that the world may acknowledge how good and pleasant a
thing it is for Brethren to dwell together in unity".

SO MOVE IT BE.

Handwritten notes:
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