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The First Step to Freemasonry

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(This paper was originally part of a report prepared for the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon by the Committee on Investigating and was meant to be given to a petitioner to read prior to his interview. The contents were taken from various Masonic papers and books. The committee members were: Bro. Robert Coe, Bro. George Dersh, W. Bro Murray C. Moxley and R. W. Bro. Brian Hemingway, chairman)

Freemasonry

Freemasonry is veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols because these are the surest ways by which moral and ethical truths may be taught. It is not only with the brain and the mind that the initiate must understand Freemasonry but also with the heart.

During the ceremony of initiation the Entered Apprentice is informed what a Lodge is.

All Masonic Lodges of Ancient Craft Masonry are "Blue Lodges." Blue being the distinctive Masonic colour — from the blue vault of heaven which is the covering of the symbolic Lodge and which embraces the world, of which the Lodge is a symbol.

To such an organization a man petitions for the degrees of Freemasonry. If the Lodge accepts his petition, a committee is appointed to investigate the petitioner. The committee reports to the Lodge whether or not, in its opinion, the petitioner is suitable material from which to make a Mason.

The statutory time having elapsed and all the members of the Lodge having been notified that the petition will come up for a ballot at a certain stated communication (Masonic word for "meeting"), the members present at the communication ballot on the petition.

The ballot is secret and both the laws and the ancient usages and customs surrounding it are very strict. No Brother is permitted to state how he will ballot or how he has balloted. No Brother is permitted to inquire of another how he will ballot or has balloted.

Harmony — oneness of mind, effort, ideas and ideals — is one of the foundations of Freemasonry. Anything which interferes with harmony hurts and institution. Therefore, it is essential that Lodges have a harmonious membership; that no man be admitted to the Masonic home of any Brother against that Brother's will.

Having passed the ballot, the petitioner in due course is notified, presents himself to the Lodge and is initiated. He then becomes an Entered Apprentice Freemason. He is a Mason to the extent that he is called "Brother" and has certain rights but he is not yet a Freemason in the legal Masonic sense.

The Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft and Master Mason

The Entered Apprentice is the responsibility of the Lodge. He can receive his Fellowcraft and Master Mason Degrees nowhere else without its permission but he does not yet pay dues to the Lodge. He can enter it only when it is open in the Entered Apprentice Degree and he cannot hold office or ballot.

He has the right of instruction by competent Brethren to obtain "suitable proficiency" in the work of the first degree, which will entitle him to his second degree, that of a Fellow Craft. It requires that he be diligent in learning and so far as he is able, he will suit his convenience as to time and place to that of his instructors.

An Entered Apprentice must learn "by heart" a part of the ritual and the ceremony through which he has passed. Easy for some, difficult for others, this is an essential task. It must be done and done well. It is no kindness to an Entered Apprentice to permit him to proceed if he has not memorized his work. (A point to note, however, is that everyone in Lodge has done this before you.)

As the initiate converses with well informed Brethren, he will learn that there are literally millions of Masons in the world. He does not know them; they do not know him. Unless he can prove that he is a Freemason, he cannot visit in a Lodge where he is not known. Hence, the requirement that the Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft and Master Mason learn his work well in his own interest.

It is also of interest to the Lodge that the initiate knows his work well. Well-informed Masons may be very useful in Lodge; the sloppy, careless workman can never be depended upon for good work.

Disconcerted at the apparent great feat of memory asked, some initiates study with an instructor for an hour or two, find it difficult and lose courage. What millions of other men have done, any initiate can do. Any man who can learn to know by heart two words can also learn three; having learned three he may add a fourth, and so on until he can stand before the Lodge and pass a creditable examination.

The initiate should be not only willing but also enthusiastically eager to learn what is required because of its effect upon his future Masonic career. The Entered Apprentice, who wins the honour of being passed to the degree of Fellow Craft by having performed well the only task set before him, goes forward feeling that he is worthy. The most important reason for learning the work thoroughly goes further; it applies more and more as the Fellow Craft Degree is reached and passed. It is most vital after the initiate has the proud right to say, "I am a Master Mason."

One of the great appeals of Freemasonry, both to the profane (one not yet a Freemason) and to Masons, is its antiquity. The Order can trace an unbroken history of more than two hundred years in its present form (the Mother Grand Lodge was formed in 1717) and has irrefutable documentary evidence of a much longer existence in simpler forms.

The Entered Apprentice, then, should not be discouraged if the ritual "comes hard." He should fail not in the task nor question it is worth while. For on what he does and on the way in which he does it depends in some measure the Freemasonry of the future. As he does well or poorly, so will those who come after him do the same.

Though he knew it not, the petitioner encountered his first Masonic symbol when he received from the hands of a friend the petition for which he had asked. Freemasons do not recruit. The Order asks no man for his petition. A man must come to the West Gate of a Lodge of his own free will and accord, and can come only by the good offices of two friends whom he has enlisted on his behalf. Greater than any man, Freemasonry honours those it permits to knock upon the door of the Lodge.

The candidate obligates himself for all times: "Once a mason, always a Mason". He may take no interest in the Order, he may demit and become unaffiliated, he may be dropped for non that the act is "of my own free will and accord." Not only must he so declare but he must so swear.

If a man is requested to join or is persuaded to sign a petition, he may later be in a position to say, "I became a Mason under misapprehension. I was over-persuaded. I was argued into membership." Thus, he might have a self-excusing shadow of a reason for failure to do as he most solemnly agreed.

He must declare in his petition and many times during his progress through the degrees, that the act is "of my own free will and accord." Not only must he so declare but he must so swear.

Freemasonry gives her all —■ and it is a great gift — to those she accepts but she gives only to those who honestly desire it. He who is not first prepared to be a Freemason in his heart, that is of his own free will and accord, can never be one.

In the Lodge men are united in the common bond of three fundamental beliefs: the Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of Man and the Immortality of the Soul. In the Lodge the initiate does as all others who have gone this way before him — from the youngest Entered Apprentice to the oldest Past Master -'and travel a common way to an end which is the same for all. .It should not come as a surprise that a special preparation for initiation is required. To the best of their ability, men prepare in some way for any new experience. Preparation for Masonic initiation is wholly a symbolic matter but with deeper and greater meanings than are apparent on first acquaintance.

Unity is an essential of a Masonic Lodge. Unity of thought, of intention and of execution. It is but another word for harmony which Freemasons are taught is the strength and support of all well regulated institutions.

Secrecy

In the true sense of the word, Freemasonry is not a secret society but a society with secrets. A secret society is one the members of which are not known; a society which exists without common knowledge. Freemasonry is well known. Men proudly wear the emblem of the Order on coats and watch charms and rings. Thousands of books have been written about Freemasonry. Obviously it is not the society which is secret.

The initiate takes an obligation of secrecy. If he carefully considers the language of that obligation, he will see that it concerns the forms and ceremonies, the manner of teaching and certain modes of recognition. There is no obligation of secrecy regarding the truths taught by Freemasonry.

The secrecy of Masonry is an honourable secrecy. Any good man may ask for her secrets and those who are worthy will receive them. However, to give them to those who do not seek or to those who are not worthy would but impoverish the Fraternity and would not enrich those who would receive them.

It is sometimes suggested that Freemasonry pretends to possess valuable secrets merely to intrigue men to apply for them through curiosity. Any Freemason knows, how mistaken this is. He who seeks Freemasonry only out of curiosity, must be bitterly disappointed. Freemasonry is anxious to give of her secrets to worthy men; men fit to receive them. Not all are worthy and not all the worthy seek.

Freemasonry has been aptly described as "the gentle Craft". Its teachings are of brotherly love, relief, truth, love of God, charity, immortality, mutual help, and sympathy. To the initiate, therefore, the penalty in his obligation comes, often, with a shock of surprise and sometimes consternation. Let it be said with emphasis that the penalties are wholly symbolic. The only punishments ever inflicted by Freemasons upon Freemasons are reprimand, suspension (definite and indefinite), and expulsion from the Fraternity. The initiate who violates his obligation will feel the weight of no hand laid upon him. He will suffer no physical penalties whatever. The contempt and detestation of his Brethren and their denial of the privileges of Freemasonry to the foresworn, are the only Masonic penalties ever inflicted.

The Holy Bible

The Holy Bible, our Great Light in Masonry, is opened upon our altars. Upon it lies the other two Great Lights ~ the square and the compasses. Without all three, no Masonic Lodge can exist, much less open or work. Together with the warrant from the Grand Lodge, they are indispensable.

A man may take his obligation on the book of his faith. An applicant may be of any faith so long as he swears to a belief in a Supreme Being. The Bible on the altar is more than the rule and guide to our faith; it is one of the greatest of Freemasonry's symbols, for the Bible is here as a symbol of all holy books of all faiths. It is the Masonic way of setting forth that simplest and most profound of truths which Masonry has made so particularly her own.

The Square is not for any one Lodge, any one nation or any one religion. It is for all Masons, everywhere. To all of which it speaks the same tongue.

Countless references in our ritual are taken from the Old Testament. Almost every name in a Masonic Lodge is from the Scriptures. In the Great Light are found those simple teachings of the universality of brotherhood, the love of God for his children, the hope of immortality and the heart and soul of Freemasonry. Let it be emphasized, these are the teachings of Freemasonry in every tongue, in every land and for those of every faith. Our Great Light is but a symbol of the Volume of the Sacred Law. Freemasonry is no more a Christian organization than it is Jewish or Mohammedan or Brahmin. Its use of the collection of sacred writings of the Jews (Old Testament) and the gospels of the New Testament as the Great light must not confuse the initiate so that he reads into Freemasonry a sectarian character which is not there. Within Freemasonry the Holy Bible and other books of faith are referred to as the Volume of the Sacred Law. By using this terminology, we distinguish all books of faith, not just the Holy Bible but any other Volume of the Sacred Law may be placed upon the Altar dependant upon the faiths of the Brethren present in Lodge.

With the presentation of the apron, the Lodge accepts the initiate as worthy. It entrusts to his hands its distinguishing badge and symbolized by it comes one of the most precious and most gracious of gifts, the gift of brotherhood.

The Principal Tenets

The Entered Apprentice receives a monitorial explanation of these which is both round and full but neither full nor round enough to instruct him wholly in these three foundation stones of the ancient Craft. Nor can he receive that roundness and fullness of explanation by words alone. He must progress through the degrees and attend his Lodge. He must see the Fraternity in action to fully understand all that Freemasonry means by Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth. A word or two may clear away some possible misapprehensions.

Brotherly love is not a sentimental phrase. It is an actuality. It means exactly what it says; the love of one Brother for another. In the everyday world, Brothers love one another for only one reason; not for blood ties alone. We have all known Brothers who could not "get along" together. Brother Freemasons get along, not because they should, not because it is "the thing to do" but simply and only because each acts like a Brother. It is as true in Freemasonry as elsewhere that "to have friends, you must be one."

The Freemason who sees a man wearing a Square and Compasses and thinks, "there is a Brother Mason, I wonder what he can do for me?" is not acting like a Brother. He who thinks, "I wonder if there is anything I can do for him," has learned the first principle of brotherhood.

The Entered Apprentice is obligated in a Lodge. All its members are predisposed in his favour and they will do all in their power to take him into the mystic circle. But the Brethren cannot do it all, the Entered Apprentice must do his part.

Freemasonry has no teachings that a Mason should not contribute to other charities. The continually insistent teaching of charity through all three degrees but especially the Entered Apprentice degree excludes none.

The final design of Freemasonry is its third principal tenet — the imperial truth. In some aspects truth seems relative because it is not complete. But the ultimates of truth are immutable and eternal like the Fatherhood of God and the Immortality of the Soul.

Resune

In the Entered Apprentice Degree, the initiate is taught the necessity of a belief in God or a Supreme Being, of charity toward all mankind but "more especially a Brother Mason," of secrecy, the meaning of brotherly love, the reason for relief the greatness of truth, the advantages of temperance, the value of fortitude, the part played in Masonic life by prudence and the equality of strict justice. He is charged to be reverent before God, to pray to Him for help and to venerate Him as the source of all that is good. He is exhorted to practise the Golden Rule and to avoid excesses of all kinds. He is admonished to be quiet and peaceable, not to countenance disloyalty nor

rebellion, to be true and just to government and country and to be cheerful under its laws. He is charged to come often to Lodge but not to neglect his business, not to argue about Freemasonry with the ignorant but to learn Masonry from Masons and once again to be secret. Finally he is urged to present only such candidates as he is sure will agree to all that he has agreed to.

The moral aspects of a Mason's character are foreshadowed in the Entered Apprentice Degree. He who lives by Brotherly Love, Relief, Truth, Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence and Justice is a moral man in the best meaning of that much abused word.

A Master Mason has a public as well as a Masonic character; he must be a citizen before he can be a Freemason. All his reputation as a Master Mason, all the teachings of integrity and fidelity, all the magnificent examples of firmness and fortitude in trial and danger — even in the Valley of the Shadow — which a man has been taught as a Master Mason are concerned in supporting with dignity his character as a citizen and as a Master Mason.

Politics or religion are never discussed in Masonic Lodges. This law is so well known and obeyed that it is not written in most Grand Lodge Constitutions nor Lodge By-Laws. No Lodge may take any political action. To do so would be to draw upon it the immediate censure of the Grand Master and the Grand Lodge. These prohibitions do not mean that Masons should not study political economy, even as a Lodge. Masons may listen to talks upon the science of government which is a "political" matter if the word is used in its broad acceptation.

Every good citizen is expected to obey the law, uphold the Constitution and the Government, do his duty in jury service, go to the polls and vote, bear arms when called to the colours, pay his just share to taxes, take an intelligent interest in the government, his party and political economy, support the public schools, reverence and honour the flag, keep the peace, serve our nation, province and town when called to leadership and to live so that his neighbours are happier.

When the citizen becomes a Freemason he adds to these moral obligations his pledged work, his sacred honour and his character as it is seen naked by God. He will do certain things and refrain from doing other things. All of these pledges involve not only his duty as a man but as a citizen. The Freemason should be a better citizen than the non-Mason because he has been better taught and has pledged his sacred honour.

Grand Lodge

Every initiate should know something of the Grand Lodge, that august body which controls the Craft. There must be a Grand Lodge, the governing body of all the particular Lodges, to give a warrant of constitution to each Lodge empowering them to meet and work.

Today no regularly constituted Lodge can come into being without the consent of an existing Grand Lodge. Most civilized countries now have Grand Lodges. The great formative period of Grand Lodges was the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

A Grand Lodge consists of all its Lodges represented by their Masters, Senior and Junior Wardens and Past Masters, as well as the current Grand Lodge Officers, Past Grand Masters and Past Grand Lodge Officers. It is the governing body in its jurisdiction. Each Grand Jurisdiction is supreme unto itself; its word on any Masonic subject is law within its own borders.

A Grand Lodge adopts a constitution and by-laws and this becomes the body of the law of the Grand Jurisdiction. However, this rests upon the Old Charges and the Constitutions which have descended to us from the Mother Grand Lodge. The legal body is supplemented by decisions made by Grand Masters or the Grand Lodge along with general regulations, laws, resolutions and edicts of the Grand Lodge. All of which are in accord with the "ancient usage and customs of the Fraternity."

In the interim between meetings of a Grand Lodge, the Grand Master acts for the Grand Lodge. His powers are arbitrary and great but not unlimited. Most Grand Lodges provide that certain acts of the Grand Master may be revised, confirmed or rejected by the Grand Lodge. This is a check upon any moves too radical. Yet, a Brother

rarely becomes a Grand Master without serving a long and arduous apprenticeship. Almost invariably he has been Master of his own Lodge and by years of service and interest, demonstrated his ability and his fitness to preside over the Grand Lodge. The real check against arbitrary actions of a Grand Master is more his Masonry than the law; more his desire to do right than in the legal power compelling him do so.

Most Grand Lodges meet once a year for business, election and installation of officers. Grand Lodges may meet in special or "emergent" communications at the call of the Grand Master.

The Grand Lodge receives and disburses certain funds. These come as assessments or donations from the constituent Lodges. The funds are spent as the Grand Lodge orders upon: charity, the maintenance of the Grand Lodge Building and its facilities, the expenses of the Grand Lodge, maintaining a Grand Secretary, his office and his staff, publication of proceedings, educational work, to name but a few.

Most Grand Lodges also publish a Book of Constitutions, which contains the constitution, by-laws and regulations of the Grand Lodge as well as the resolutions, edicts and decisions under which the Craft works. The interested Mason will procure these items at his earliest convenience so that he may be well informed of the laws and customs of his jurisdiction.

These are the steps one faces on his way to becoming a Freemason. You have now completed the first step in your journey by asking admittance to probably the finest fraternity in the world.