

MASTER

Great honor comes to any brother when he is elevated to the Oriental Chair of a Masonic Lodge. Few Wardens but look forward with mingled pleasure and anxiety to that day when in their hands will be placed the gavel of authority. He who early prepares to be a Master in more than name only arrives in the seat of authority with some confidence.

To be Master of a Lodge is quite different from being president of a club or society. The Master is called upon to decide questions of law and practice which he cannot leave to his brethren; the honor of leadership carries also the responsibility. That his decisions be wise and just, and of such a character as will draw commendation, not condemnation, from Grand Master or District Deputy, he must know the laws of his jurisdiction and his own powers and limitations. He can obtain this knowledge only from a faithful study of the book of Masonic law.

Specifically, the Master must familiarize himself with Grand Lodge law upon applications, amendments, ballots and balloting, burial, candidates (residence, qualifications, physical perfection, etc.). charges, correspondence with other Lodges, degrees, dimits, dispensations (especially as to when they are necessary), dual membership (if authorized by Grand Lodge or not authorized by that body), dues, education, elections, examinations, finances, installation, jurisdiction, membership, minutes, motions (when not in order), objections to candidates, offenses, petitions, processions, proxies, rejection. returns of Lodges, special communications, summons, Sunday observances, trials, visits and visitors, votes and voting (when paper ballot required; when majority; when two-thirds and when unanimous needed, etc.) waiver of jurisdiction.

Learning all this is not easy, but being a .good Master is not supposed to be easy. To have been elected Master presupposes a willingness to labor, and here is labor and plenty of it.

A Master is not only leader of his Lodge but a member of Grand Lodge, in which august body he represents his Lodge. Familiarity with the Grand Lodge procedure, questions pending, legislation enacted, etc., gives him a perspective and enables him to act with intelligence and understanding. In the Proceedings of most (not all) Grand Lodges is the report of. the Committee on Foreign Correspondence, under which apparently misleading title an official reviewer summarizes the activities of other Grand Lodges. The Master who realizes that he is not only an important cog in his own Masonic machine, but an integral part of a world-wide Freemasonry, early grasps the real importance and responsibilities of his position. Study of the Proceedings gives a perspective on the activities of Grand Lodge, with special reference to its charity, whether exercised in Masonic Home, Orphanage. Hospital, Foundation, outside relief or other form.

Few assets are more valuable to a Master than friends. In Freemasonry, as in the profane world, the art of making friends is encompassed in one phrase: "to have friends we must be friendly." Millions of men are so at heart; cold of exterior from no better cause than shyness. Many a man

wants to extend his hand, wishes to say a cheery word of greeting, desires with all his heart to be "one of the fellows" and does not know how.

Yet it is so simple! For the root of personal shyness is fear of laughter - and laughter, like thunder, has yet to hurt anything living. The shy brother need only assure himself: "I will not be afraid of something which cannot hurt me - I will not think my brethren are more critical of me than I am of them - I will not waste time and strength wanting and not doing, when to say a cheery word and put out my hand needs but a muscular effort!"

Friendliness begets friendliness. The brother who is cordial finds hands spring out to meet his; sees smiles beget smiles; learns that genuine interest in a brother produces real interest in him. The Warden who leaves the West for the East interested enough to know all regular attendants by name will enter his year of responsibility with an asset than which there is no greater for the leader of a Lodge.

No Master can afford a temper, and should not expect courtesy or consideration from his brethren if he does not show both from the East. Luckily, few men attain the East without long experience which generates appreciation of the honor, and creates a desire to rule justly, fairly, impartially, courteously. The Master's great power increases with lack of asserting. The mailed fist is no less potent that it wears a velvet glove.

Other important duties of a Master include:

To obey, enforce, defend, the Ancient Landmarks, the laws, rules, edicts of Grand Lodge and Grand Master, and the by-laws of his Lodge.

To enforce and defend the prerogatives that belong to his office; never to permit any brother to encroach upon these, no matter what feeling of personal modesty may dictate to the contrary. The Master has a duty to those who follow him, to hand down the office, with its dignity and its rights, its privileges and its responsibilities, unchanged.

To preserve order in his Lodge at all times: it is disagreeable to call a brother to order, but it is unthinkable that any brother be allowed to interfere with the solemnities of a degree.

To see that his officers learn, and perform, their work in a proper manner. The Master is responsible: it is the Master's part to demand and receive enthusiastic cooperation from his officers.

To train all his officers, and familiarize even the minor ones with Lodge affairs. A weekly meeting of all officers, at lunch or some officer's home in the evening, is a splendid way of getting opportunities to "talk things over." Where this is not practical, a half hour officers' meeting before or after a Lodge meeting is a means of providing unity of effort and ideals in conduct of Lodge affairs.

Does all this appear too much of an ideal ? It is not half of it!

The ideal is the perfection toward which we stretch eager hands - but never grasp. The ideal Master has never presided in any East, for the ideal Master would be perfect and perfection is not given to human beings.

But the clearer and more attractive the ideal is, the more strenuously the eager may strive toward it, and the nearer they may approach it.

The ideal Master knows his Masonry. He has spent many years with many books. To him the romance, the history, the high lights of adventure, the great men who are Masons, the great Masons who have led the Craft are familiar. In spirit he has stood beside the king's Master Mason at the construction of one of the great cathedrals of Europe. He has supped with Ashmole and breakfasted with Sir Christopher Wren. He has sat in Lodge with Preston, Desaugliers, Hutchinson, Jeremy Cross, a thousand others. He has assisted at the initiation, passing and raising of Washington, and knelt with him at Valley Forge. He has learned Masonic wisdom at Ben Franklin's feet. He has traveled westward with Freemasonry, from its first beginnings in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania to the Pacific coast. Through Revolution, War of 1812, the Mexican campaigns, the Civil War, the Spanish War, the World War, he has seen Masonry work her gentle miracles.

He knows something of Masonic literature, what books to recommend to his brethren, where to find the answer to the questions which will be asked him; the ideal Master has had a Masonic book in his pocket or at his bedside for years before he attained the East.

The ideal Master looks at his Lodge and sees it wholly harmonious. No rifts or schisms develop under him; peace and harmony prevail. He soothes the unhappy and brings together the parted friends. He caters to the cranky and makes them content; he avoids all jealousies. He is friends with every Past Master, every officer, every brother.

The ideal Master leaves his Lodge better off financially than he found it; he spends less than the income and for what he spends the Lodge receives full value.

The ideal Master pays great attention to the duties which are his in Grand Lodge; he faithfully attends, intelligently takes part in the deliberations, votes with the interests of his jurisdiction at heart, is a constructive force in the governing body of Freemasonry.

The ideal Master has interesting meetings. He is willing to work, and work hard, arranging programs, planning events which will not only interest but instruct the brethren. They are better Masons and therefore better men because of the hours they spend within the tiled doors of the Lodge over which he presides.

To the Craft the ideal Master gives "good and wholesome instruction." No brother goes from one of his meetings without something done or said which leaves a higher thought of Masonry in his heart. His degrees are dignified, well put on. His candidates have not only ritualistic instruction, but are told something of "what it is all about" that they, too, may "become good and faithful brethren among us." His officers are given a mark at which to shoot when the slow wheel of time turns them, too, into the Oriental Chair.

The ideal Master considers the ill and the sorrowing as his personal care, as well as that of the Lodge. No brother takes to his bed or calls the doctor but the Master sees him to bring what cheer he may. No widow or fatherless child grieves for one gone to the Great White Lodge but has the comfort of a word, a tear, from the leader of his brethren. As much as a man may do, he does for those bound to him and to his Lodge by the Mystic Tie.

No brother or family of a brother in want but is helped, so far as the Lodge may help. It may be that the only help is suggestion, advice, counsel - but it is a friendly touch in the hour of need. If it is food, clothing, medicine for those too poor to buy for themselves, the ideal Master makes it his business to know the facts and to bring a sympathetic report to his Lodge.

The ideal Master has no trouble preserving the dignity of his office, because brethren respect Masters who respect the East. He hands on the gavel of authority unsullied by defiance to the brother who succeeds him in the East.

The ideal Master counts not his personal pleasure, his social engagements, his hours of rest, recreation, aye, even his sleep, when his Lodge calls. He puts his Lodge and its needs before anything and everything in his life for this year, save only his family and his God. He is Master of the Lodge, but in a very real sense, is servant of his brethren, and takes pleasure in his service, knowing it to be honorable before all men.

The ideal Master carries a watch and uses it. If fifty brethren wait ten minutes past the hour for a late Master, he wastes more than eight hours of fraternal time - which he has no more right to do than to waste Lodge money. His degrees start at a reasonable hour that they may be conducted unhurriedly, and he requires promptness of his officers as he himself is prompt.

The traditions of his Lodge and of the Fraternity are hallowed in his mind and practice, The Ancient Landmarks are preserved, the laws, resolutions and edicts of Grand Lodge lived up to, the by-laws meticulously observed. The records of his Lodge are kept so as to draw commendation from authority.

The ideal Master is guide, philosopher and friend to many brethren for many troubles; brethren turn to a Master, at times, when they will go to no one else. He is, perhaps, mediator in a domestic trouble, he counsels with a father over a wayward boy, he helps a widow invest her money wisely, he obtains employment for those without work: he does almost everything for every one, aye, even to washing a child's face and painting a porch, one Master's contribution to the household of a sick brother!

The ideal Master keeps constantly before him the need for seeing his problems through a tolerant smile of understanding. If he ever had a temper, he lost it for the year before he entered the East. He has constantly before him the thought that many men have many minds, and that two brethren of directly opposite views may both be honest and sincere. He does not take sides but is a balance wheel: he rules firmly and justly, but the firmness is tempered with kindness and the justice with mercy.

The ideal Master is enthusiastic about his work, and prayerfully conscious of his own limitations; hence he is quick to seek counsel and advice, and as slow to take it until he has thought it through.

The ideal Master is eager for suggestions - but he does not follow those which seem to him unwise, no matter how important the brother who makes them. His is the responsibility; therefore his must the decision be, but he knows that two heads are usually better than one, and welcomes counsel when it is offered, seeks it when it is shy.

The ideal Master is primarily concerned with policies rather than details, and delegates the latter to carefully chosen committees. But he keeps, ever before him his responsibilities, and knows what is going on. Too many Masters have become bogged in details and thus lost the path to success. The ideal Master does not lose his way!

The ideal Master is an ideal Mason; Masonry is a part of him, as he is a part of Masonry. With all his heart and soul and strength he strives to live the Masonic life that all brethren may see that here is no mere figurehead, but a vital force.

Finally, the ideal Master is humble minded. Not for him the arrogant pride of place and power, though he has both power and place. Nor for him the big stick, though it is his to wield, but the silken string which leads where ropes may not haul. The ideal Master keeps ever before him the knowledge that although elevated to the most honorable position within the gift of his Lodge, he can really fill the Oriental Chair only if he thinks first, last and all the time of the Lodge and brethren, never of self.

High? Of course it is high! All real ideals are too high to reach until we can reach out and touch the stars. But we can make the effort to reach . . .

Uneasy the Past Master's head which lies on a sleepless pillow, thinking sad thoughts of opportunities missed, of duties undone, of work which now can never be his to do. Happy the Master who lays down his gavel at the end of his year knowing he has done all that in him lies; mortal man may do no more. He it is who may stand in the East for the last time, just before he installs his successor. wearing a sprig of rosemary in his lapel,

"Rosemary - that's for remembrance."