

Many Men, Many Minds

(So much interest was aroused by "Jurisdictional Contrasts", Short Talk Bulletin of July, 1935, and so many requests were made for "further light" on the differences in Masonic practices in the several States, that this Bulletin, really a continuation of Number 7, Volume XIII, is offered the Masonic reading public.)

A Mason soon learns that the ritual and ceremonies of a neighboring Jurisdiction are different from those by which he became a member of the Craft, but it is only when he travels widely through this great land, with its forty-nine Grand Jurisdictions and more than sixteen thousand Lodges, that he realizes in how many ways Masonic practice and custom have been altered by time, latitude and longitude, different people, ideas, beginnings.

As sons and daughters inherit from both father and mother, and are exactly like neither, so Masonic Grand Jurisdictions formed from Lodges of Several origins, are exactly like none of their several ancestors.

In a majority of our Grand Jurisdictions a sincere effort to use uniform ritual is made; to have the forms and ceremonies in Lodge A the same as in Lodges B, C and D. But uniform ritual is not universal, even in Jurisdictions which pride themselves upon the fact. Thus, in the District of Columbia, with its small territory and compact Masonic population, there is no difficulty in the maintenance of uniformity of ritual in forty-four of the forty-five Lodges. One Lodge has an especial ritual for a part of the Sublime Degree. It is "old Maryland work" and when Naval Lodge became Number 4 on the District of Columbia Grand Lodge register, it was with the proviso that it be permitted to keep this particular manner and method in the conferring of the third degree.

In Hiram Lodge No. 1, of Connecticut, the Master Mason's due guard is given with one hand, anal in the Nutmeg State are several different rituals, all with the respectability of antiquity and all permitted by Grand Lodge.

In many Jurisdictions of the Union a candidate must pass through the ceremonies by himself, no matter how many candidates crowd the West Gate. In others, the visitor will find as many as five in a "class" all receiving the ceremonies, including the obligation, at once, and in Washington, D.C., as many as seven may receive the degree at one time. Here, as elsewhere, this is exclusive of the second section of the third degree, which all candidates receive alone. But in many Jurisdictions there is a "short form" for all third degree candidates except the last.

In spite of variations in ritual, form and ceremony, the nation is united in substance of Masonic teachings. One Jurisdiction — Pennsylvania — has a system of work more markedly different from others than these differ among themselves. The visitor to a Pennsylvania Lodge will find much that is unfamiliar. But when a Master's degree is concluded, he will see that the teachings and the fundamentals are the same, even while he marvels that the identical doctrine may be taught in so different if equally beautiful a manner from that he knows.

Pennsylvania ritual and ceremonies are solemn and inspiring, as all Masonic ritual which teaches the faith and practice of the Ancient Craft must be; that they are "different" but makes them the more interesting to the stranger within the hospitable gates of a Lodge in the Keystone State.

In many Grand Jurisdictions, a single ballot elects for all three degrees. In others a ballot must be had on each candidate before each degree, and in Virginia there are two ballots before the Fellowcraft and Master Mason degree — one on the candidate's ritualistic proficiency, the other upon his moral worth and fitness. Many Jurisdictions adhere to the ancient custom of the examination of Entered Apprentices and Fellowcrafts in open Lodge, before permitting advancement; in others, the Master accepts the avouchment of an instructor that the candidates have attained a "suitable proficiency" to entitle them to the next degree.

Many old English taverns possessed an actual flight of winding stairs leading to an upper chamber; some historians have endeavored to connect the "winding stairs" to the middle chamber with these. However that may be, Lodges do not all use "floor carpets" with a "rude representation" of a flight of winding stairs. In many Temples in this country are beautiful flights of winding stairs leading either from the Lodge room to a room or gallery above, or from an ante- room to a "middle chamber" on an upper level. Detroit's magnificent Temple is so equipped, so is that in Fort Worth, Texas, and there are many in New York, to mention but a few. That it must be more impressive to the candidate actually ascending while learning his three, five and seven steps, is hardly open to argument.

The gavel with which the Master rules the Craft is of all shapes and sizes. The familiar mallet form, probably most common, occasionally gives way to the wedge-shaped tool with a handle more square than round, and sometimes to a setting maul. In some Jurisdictions there is a gavel in the East and setting mauls for the Wardens. Whatever the merit of the symbolism of the setting maul for a Master, it can become somewhat awkward, as when a beloved brother receives one made of precious metal in a weight of several pounds!

Past Master's jewels are usually formed of a pair of compasses open sixty degrees upon a quadrant. In a number of Jurisdictions, either from lack of familiarity with the original symbolism of this emblem, or for other reasons, the compasses are above a square, surrounded partially by the quadrant. In Pennsylvania, the Past Master's jewel is the same as in England — a silver representation of the forty- seventh problem of Euclid.

In forty-three of our forty-nine Grand Jurisdictions, Masons display the square and compasses on the Altar. In six they use the square and compass! In few, if any, of these six will the curious discover any serious attempt to defend the use of the word "compass" (which is a mariner's instrument) in place of the "compasses" (which is the tool used by architects and builders) . But "we have always called it compass" — and no one who knows and loves his old time ritual with all its curious verbiage and, sometimes, ungrammatical phrases, but will agree it is a good reason not to change.

Aprons are worn in one Jurisdiction in a certain way as a Fellowcraft and another way as a Master Mason. Cross the state line, and learn that what is correct for a Fellowcraft in one Jurisdiction is right only for a Master Mason in the next. And both Jurisdictions will have many good arguments to prove that theirs is the "one right way!"

Grand Lodge aprons differ from one another as one star differeth from another in glory! Massachusetts and New York equip their Grand Masters with aprons so heavily encrusted with gold embroidery and lace that they cost hundreds of dollars, are imported from abroad, weigh pounds, cannot be folded, and must be worn with a leather belt to hold them up! Rosettes and tassel, emblems and decorations, are upon many Grand Lodge officers' aprons. Texas has a Past Grand Master's apron in which the forty-seventh problem conventionalized and repeated in a circular form, is embroidered in many colors — the general effect at a little distance is of a beautiful bouquet of flowers. New Jersey edges all Grand Officers aprons with purple, and permits no emblems or decorations at all. The District of Columbia Grand Lodge Officers, from Grand Master to Tiler, wear lambskin aprons of white with a white silk edge.

Dress in Lodge and Grand Lodge varies with Jurisdiction and the time of meeting. In Pennsylvania a Grand Lodge Officer is correctly dressed only when he wears evening clothes, with a black tie and white gloves. In other Grand Lodges, meeting in the day, cutaway coats and striped trousers are correct — only recently did Delaware desist from the old "frock coat" of our forefathers in favor of more modern dress. But in many Grand Lodges any sort of dress is permissible, and more than one Grand Master of a fine Grand Jurisdiction has presided in a fedora and business suit. In extremely hot climes, it is not impossible to find a Grand Master presiding without a coat at all !

To most Masons a degree is a ceremony put on in a Lodge room in a Temple. In some Jurisdictions this Lodge room must be upon a second floor, to make certain no eavesdroppers may peep in through windows inadvertently left unshuttered. But not all degrees are so staged. In North Dakota, Utah and Arizona, to mention only three, degrees are not infrequently put on out of doors. North Dakota has a "Masonic Island", famous in that Jurisdiction for Masonic picnics, excursions, outings; upon it is a well-equipped Lodge room, the furniture made of cement, and degrees are put on under the trees.

Lodges usually meet every week, every two weeks, once a month, and the stated Communications are set forth as the "first Monday" or the "First and Third Tuesdays," etc. But there are yet some Lodges in the nation which meet "at the full of the moon" throwing backs to an early day when a moonlight night to go from farm to hall in town meant comfort, and a dark night, discomfort and danger.

Masonic funerals differ widely in the several States. In some the Master conducts the whole service; in others, the Wardens take part. Some Lodges deposit only the acacia — others add a scroll, and still others lay a glove with the apron. In one Jurisdiction, at least, the brethren all throw each a shovel full of earth into the grave. Some Jurisdictions have but one service — one has six. Many have two. Some are long, some are short. A very few are wholly comforting

to the bereaved; many — based largely on the old Prestonian service — are gloomy with the "habiliments of death", the "silent tomb" "the mournful procession" and the "dark and gloomy grave."

Ceremonial forms differ widely. Two of the most colorful are unique — the "Grand Visitation" of the Grand Master and all his officers to every constituent Lodge in the District of Columbia, a ceremony replete with color, strictly according to an old ritual and quite different from anything of its kind elsewhere, and the "St. John's Day procession" of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts. This beautiful and unique ceremony, in which the Grand Lodge parades through the Masonic Temple in honor of the newly elected Grand Master, includes carrying the red, white and blue candles, lighted, and the urn, made by Paul Revere, containing a lock of Washington's hair. The Grand Master, in golden apron, collar, armlets and cockade hat, is a resplendent figure, but the sanctity of age and long usage hangs over the ceremony, which none who are so fortunate to see ever forget.

The vast majority of Lodges meet at night a few, formed to give a Masonic home to night workers, meet in the day. Famous among these is St. Cecile, of New York, in which musicians of note, actors, newspaper men and others of talents which must be marketed after dark, hold Masonic congress in the afternoon. The vast majority of Lodges work in the English language, but there are several German speaking Lodges, notable Aurora of Wisconsin, and some which use the French, in New Orleans; others work in Spanish, in the far southwest. Most, if not all of these, are required by Grand Lodges to keep records in English.

In most Lodges nominations for Master are taboo — in Virginia, no election is possible without at least two nominations. True, the Senior Warden is almost invariably nominated and as almost invariably elected, but Virginia requires a possible choice made manifest to the brethren prior to election.

Membership is single, dual, plural. States having dual but not plural membership, permit their members, sojourning in foreign Jurisdictions, to join Lodges in those Jurisdictions, provided such have a reciprocal agreement. Plural membership Jurisdictions permit a brother to belong to as many Lodges as he will within the Jurisdiction, to which he cares to pay dues. In some Jurisdictions, to join another Lodge a brother must have a dimit, (or demit, depending on the orthography of the State.) In others he may get a "letter of transfer" which keeps him a member of his Lodge until elected by another Lodge; thus, if he is rejected in the Lodge of his choice, he is not without a Masonic home. Certain Grand Jurisdictions refuse a dimit unless a brother is to leave the State, or demonstrates that he is to join another Lodge and will not be an unaffiliated Mason.

And for a final curiosity, in one Grand Jurisdiction in the nation, it is not unheard of to appoint the newly made Past Grand Master as Junior Grand Steward, which serves the double purpose of giving him something to do for a year that he be not wholly lost when stepping down from the Grand East, and also takes from the new Grand Master all worries about the selection of his appointee!

Different men, different minds; different States, different ideas; different Jurisdictions, different Masonic practices. Yet in spite of the contrasts, the variations, the wide divergence in what seems to the untraveled Mason "the right Masonic way", Masonry in the United States is wholly at one in essentials; wholly a unit in its teachings, its fundamentals, its philosophy. It is one of the great tributes to the adaptability of the American genius, that it be so at variance in unimportant details, remaining so wholly united in all that is important and essential in the Ancient Craft.

[The Masonic Service Association of North America](#)