

# THE ART OF PRESIDING

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"Preside--to sit in authority over others." (Standard Dictionary.)

The first principle of successful presiding is to use authority without any one being conscious, of it !

The presiding officer elected by a secular organization is amenable to its dictates and may be removed by the electorate; an appeal may be taken from his decision to the to the body over which he presides; generally he is supposed to conduct its meetings according to the rules of order.

None of this is true of the Master of a Lodge. While elected, he is not controlled by the dictates of his Lodge; he can only be removed by Grand Master or Deputy under authority of the Grand Master; no appeal to the Lodge may be taken from his awards: "rules of order," while followed in general, are actually the Master's will and pleasure.

## MOTIONS OUT OF ORDER

In any secular body a motion to adjourn, for the previous question, to lay on the table, to refer to a committee of the whole, are always in order; in a Masonic Lodge, never. Only the Master can decide these questions, and even a Master should never permit the lodge to resolve itself into a committee of the whole since a committee presupposes a Chairman and a Chairman is the servant, not the ruler, of the Committee.

With the usual business of Lodge: confirming of minutes, accepting petitions, ordering a ballot, putting motions to expend, etc.. have little trouble. It is when difficult questions arise; hard fought battles to raise dues : revision of by-laws; putting standing resolutions on the books: accepting and confirming a report which reflects on some officer. etc.. that the Master must temper justice with mercy, and authority with discretion.

## KEEP COOL

The rule is usually wise which avoids heated debates. When debaters become so personal as to forget brotherly acts in the warmth of partisanship, a Master is justified in closing debate for the time, act- on the question when cooler moments arrive. A Master may always call from labor to "refreshment, to permit "cooling off." If he does this with a smile, and some remark about his own need for a little reflection, he will offend no one. GAVEL

The Masonic gavel in the hands of a Master is all powerful. Brethren must-and with practically no exceptions always obey its mandate. Grand Lodge frowns upon the brother who flouts the authority of a Master ; a brother not willing to cease speaking when "rapped down," or who insists on speaking when not recognized, is subject to Masonic trial and punishment Because of the power of the gavel the good Master uses it sparingly; he will never "rap down" a brother if it is possible to

avoid it. If a brother insists on doing something illegal, the Master must, of course. But there is a vast difference in the way this is done by different Masters.

A certain Past Master was offended at the adverse report of a committee on investigation of a petitioner. Securing recognition he began : "I think we should disregard this committee report unless we know why the committee reported unfavor-able, : I demand their reasons. . ."

The Master could have brought his gavel down with a bang and said: "Brother Past Master, you are out of order; a Past Master ought to know better!"

What he did do was bring his gavel down with enough decision to be heard, then said: "Brother Past Master, I regret exceedingly to rule out of order one of my illustrious and learned predecessors. But my understanding of Masonic law is that the reasons for reporting unfavorably by a committee are as sacred as the ballot. I am sorry.

This seems almost too simple to chronicle, and yet it is just this difference between the hard and fast exercise of undoubted power which men are apt to resent, and the patient brotherly courtesy which Masons appreciate, which marks the successful from the disliked presiding officer.

#### A "GOOD SPORT"

A finance committee brought in a report ",which severely criticized a Master's administration, practically accusing him of running wild with the Lodge finances. Shocked but game, without a word of defense, he put the question as to the disposition of the report. Brother after brother arose to discuss the report, to delete this and strike out that, to remove that offending phrase and to soften this one. After some ten minutes debate one brother, a loyal partisan of the Master, moved rejection of the whole report and appointment of a new finance committee. "I am sorry, not to entertain that motion." the Master said with a smile. "I think the committee has rendered a fine report. I do not refer to their opinions, but to the hours of labor and the results in this excellent financial statement. I would be ungrateful indeed if I discharged this com-mitten, or failed to express our appreciation of its efforts."

The Lodge applauded vigorously, and the result was the acceptance of the financial part of the report, with all criticism stricken out. Most important, the members of the committee, sincere and honorable gentlemen, felt that the Master had been just; thus any schism was avoided, the Master was pro-tented, the Lodge satisfied and the commit-tee content.

One wrong word, and a first class Lodge quarrel might have started!

#### SNAP AND SPEED

Some men think like a lightning flash and others think slowly. Even the slow thinker can speed up his business meetings by having previously written notes before him. The Masters who depend on their Secretaries to tell them what to do next are legion--what would some of us do without those hard worked and loyal officials! But the Master who lets the Secretary do it all rarely has the respect or veneration of his members.

## LET THEM TALK!

A good Master remembers that he is Master of all the Lodge---not just those members with whom he is in sympathy-. He knows that what is unimportant to him may be vital to some other brother. The member who insists on a bowling match or a golf game with a sister lodge may feel it just as important as the Master's plans for a Masonic evening---let him talk about it! Of course. there is a limit to all things, and a scheduled degree should not be delayed so as to keep the few faithful up half the night, sending the rest home without seeing it. But, within reason, the Master who encourages his members to speak, who calls on Brothers Smith and Jones for a few remarks about some question, will have a more unified and interested Lodge than he who is anxious to shut off debate.

## WELCOMES

They are as different in different Lodges as chalk is from cheese. Some Lodges extend no special welcomes; in others a word of greeting to all visitors is customary, especially those vouched for by a committee after an examination. In some Lodges, the Past Masters are known only by their jewels; in others the Master calls on each by name, says a pleasant word and offers him the pretty courtesy of a

seat in the East." Now and then a Master is so anxious to be courteous that he offers the "seat in the East" to every visitor. which rather destroys its value as a mark of special consideration for those who have borne the heat and burden of the day.

One small error many a Master makes with only politeness in his mind; taking off his hat whenever he speaks, especially when he extends a welcome.

The "hat snatcher," however well-intentioned, displays a fundamental ignorance of the meaning of the Master's hat. It is not, strictly speaking. a hat at all, but a badge of office. There is no more reason to remove it when speaking -than there is to take off apron or jewel. A Master need remove his hat on but four occasions; when speaking of. or to, Deity; when speaking of a death; when the Grand Master or his Deputy comes into the Lodge room wearing a hat, or when tendering the gavel of authority to another to preside.

## RESPECT

It is emphatically the Master's business to insist upon profound respect for his office. Many a modest man refrains from correcting a wrong Lodge action in the mistaken idea that brethren will think he is "high hat." A brother may be plain John Smith, but when John Smith is Master, he should receive the respect which that office demands. The brother who makes the wrong salute should be smilingly corrected ---but he should not go unchallenged. The brother so careless of his manners as to salute with a cigar in his mouth may be privately, admonished, but he should hear from the East. The brother who Crosses between Altar and East should learn that brethren do not use the space between Master and Great Lights for a passageway. because, as the Great Lights are in the Master's charge. he is entitled to keep them always in view. The brother who speaks out of turn, the brother who tries to leave the room during a ballot, the brother who forgets a proper salute when addressing the East---all should receive some word of friendly counsel. Whether it be done

before the Lodge, or by sending a message by the Senior Deacon, is for the Master to decide. His brethren in the end will think the, more of him if he passes his high station to his successor with its dignity unimpaired.

### SMILE

Nothing succeeds in the East like a smile. Two Masters reigned in sister Lodges at the same time; one a brilliant lawyer, smart as a steel trap, wit like a rapier . . . and cold and austere as a lump of ice. The other Master was a railroad conductor; he had not one-tenth the education, wit or brilliance of the lawyer, but he knew the gentle art of making friends. Whatever pleasant he had to do, he did as if he liked to do it, with a smile. Whatever unpleasant was his task, he did as if it pained him, but with a smile. The railroad brother's Lodge was crowded and the brilliant, lawyer's all but empty most of the year.

Smiles, alas, cannot be made to order. Set smiles, machine smiles, mere facial contortions won't work. Effective smiles come from a smiling heart. By all of which it may be seen that the art of presiding successfully has its foundation in sympathy and understanding. and its cornerstone in good nature and tolerance. With these a Master can hardly fail to be a beloved presiding officer.

### NERVOUS!

It is only three steps from the Lodge, floor to the Master's platform but what high steps! The brother presiding for the first time in a Masonic Lodge who says he is not nervous is fooling himself, but no one else.

But there is no need to continue to be nervous. In a traffic jam the motorist can always stop---the worst he will get is a lot of horns tooted at him and perhaps a "bawling out" by the policeman. In a parliamentary jam the Master can always stop to look up the law or precedent, or call to refreshment while he consults some one; he will hear neither horns nor bawling out. Go slowly, consult the agenda: depend on the Secretary to help; use the gavel sparingly; smile . . . and presiding becomes a pleasure and a Master a joy to his brethren.

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