

An Address by
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My address to-night is
Freemasonry and Masonic Etiquette

The word "Freemasonry" conveys its own meaning, but "Etiquette" is intended to be understood, the social observances required- but it also has in its wider meaning as to behaviour- to dress- etc. to be observed by particular persons upon particular occasions, forms which are observed in particular places - in the Lodge Room. Unwritten code restricting men in what concerns interests of their brethren or dignity of their profession .

In accordance with the wider interpretation of the word "Etiquette" many duties and details not provided for in the Book of Constitution, or in our Ritual, should be considered, discussed and explained. The Ritual contains directions here and there; but they are necessarily brief, and in some cases misunderstood or wrongly interpreted. The saying is strictly true, that the Master of the Lodge however perfect he may be, cannot achieve his best unless he is supported and assisted by his officers; whereas, if he be intelligently and zealously assisted by them , and the Ceremonies be well carried out by all concerned, then the resulting effort to reflect upon the candidate -almost to a certainty- will be, that he will form a favourable opinion of the Institution as to inspire him with a lasting love of the craft. It will cause him to be "a true and faithful Brother among us". On the other hand, if the duties of the Officers and the Ritual work are performed in a sloppy manner, the beauty and impressions of the ceremony will be marred or lost by the Candidate.

The experience of every thoughtful and intelligent Freemason, who attends his own lodge and visits regularly, will confirm this belief. He must know instances where for the want of proper attention to detail on the part of the Officers, and the absence of the proper preparation for the business to be transacted, have lead to confusion and delay, and have had a great measure of poor work. In such cases as this and those where confusion, whispering, darting about the Lodge room, to the great annoyance of all concerned, and to the distraction of the candidate, leaving him with a poor impression of our great institution.

Want of careful detail, arrangement and a deficiency in ceremony, ought not to occur in any Lodge, such a state is incompatible with the dignity of the Worshipful Master. It is the duty of the Director of Ceremonies, and indeed the duty of every Officer of the Lodge to see that everything goes "smoothly".

Early in our Masonic careers we were taught that Freemasonry is a system of Morality veiled in allegory. It is natural that diversities, small though numerous in their origin should arise, and unless there exists some kind of standard by which present practice may be brought continually into conforming with the original precept of the craft, slight diversions bring other and larger diversions, the result is sometimes interesting and sometimes disastrous.

There is also a problem where things have been done wrong for years and if any Brother attempts to change back to what it should be he runs into that wall of "customs of the Lodge". My own thoughts on this matter of "customs" only applies to those lodges that joined the Grand Lodge of New Zealand, and those Lodges who received their original charter from the Grand Lodge of New Zealand do not have customs.

We all know more or less what Freemasonry is, but it will be well to say a few words indicating what Freemasonry is not. Freemasonry is not nor is it intended to be a benefit Society, from which in return for certain subscriptions, certain benefits are received, in other words, any person intending to be initiated should be warned against entertaining or being influenced by mercenary or other unworthy motives as regard to his advantages in joining such a Society as Freemasonry claims to be, its aims are to help others; and its noble gifts are intended for the benefit of others; and those who join ought to be in such a position as will permit them, without detriment to themselves or their connections: to give freely to those truly Masonic ornaments such as Benevolence or Charity.

Who are fit and proper persons to be made Freemasons ?

This is a most important question, and one which lies at the foundation of the Masonic structure. It should be carefully considered before the Initiation of a Candidate, as it will be too late to discuss it afterwards. It should be carefully considered before the Candidate is proposed, the great responsibility attached to those who seek to introduce members. One excellent test to be applied is this: Is the proposed Candidate one whom we would invite into our own home, and introduce to our family circle with confidence, if you say NO to this then you should not propose him, we require worthy men not just members who will be here to-day and gone to-morrow, saying Freemasonry is not for me.

Ballot.

A few words may not be out of place as to the Principles of Balloting. Although the use of the Black Ball is provided for in the Constitution, and although the power of employing it is one which is essential to possess, and keep in reserve, it is a power which should only be used in extreme cases. There are other means of effecting the same object more masonically. If there are serious reasons for objecting to the admission of a new member, representation may be made, confidentially if need be (but better, if quite open) to the Worshipful Master, or the Secretary or even to the Board of Enquiry. This way the opportunity is there for the proposer to withdraw the name without inflicting any indignity on the proposed Candidate.

Warrant or Charter.

The Warrant of the Lodge is specially entrusted to the Master for the time being at his Installation. He is responsible for its safe keeping, and must produce it at every meeting of the Lodge. Most Lodges have the certificate framed and hung on the wall, but some (Daytime) hold meetings in several Lodges and have to carry the charter from Lodge Room to Lodge Room. If the Warrant or Charter is not present in the Lodge Room the Lodge cannot be opened. The Warrant/Charter must be present.

Ritual.

The Ritual should be very carefully studied by every member of the Lodge. Indeed, every Brother should begin to learn it after his raising. In this manner, he will gradually prepare himself for the time when he is given a charge to give, and becomes an officer of the Lodge. The appearance of the Ritual in Lodge should be never allowed, and the good delivery of the charges without reference to the Book, is the highest attainment and gives a lasting impression, especially on the Candidate's mind. Likewise it is considered bad Etiquette if a Brother opens his Ritual, in Lodge, and appears to follow the delivery to compare or prompt, this should be left to the official prompt.

Furniture of the Lodge.

This should be kept neat to contribute towards the dignity of the Lodge. In some Lodges you find the VSL dilapidated and the tools old and worn. These show a want of proper respect to the VSL which is given as the rule and guide of our faith, the Compasses, the Jewel of the Grand Master, the square, the time honoured emblem of the Craft, which teaches us to regulate our lives and actions. A handsomely bound VSL of moderate size, the Square and Compasses of silver, will scarcely be beyond the means of any Lodge. The Jewels comprising three movable and three immovable. The movable jewels are the Square, Level and Plum rule, so called movable because they are worn by the Master and his Wardens, during their term of office, and are transferred to their successors on the night of Installation. The immovable jewels are the Tracing Board, the Rough and Perfect Ashlars. These are called immovable because they lie open and immovable in the Lodge, for the Brethren to moralise upon.

Inside the Lodge.

In entering into the Lodge and in performing the Ceremonies, it is necessary to follow the course of the clock, in the northern hemisphere it is necessary to follow the course of the sun. The three principal Officers should leave their chairs on the left side and return to them on the right. In the East the Master takes the Middle chair, with the Deputy Master on his right, the I.P.M. on his left, with visiting Masters on his left, it is not necessary for the Pastmasters to sit in the East, it is a privilege not a requirement. It is better for the Pastmasters to sit in the body of the lodge, as this tends to break down the barriers of rank and fosters friendship and unity with the younger members. On the Masters right in the East is reserved for members of Grand Lodge.

Jewels.

The Jewels to be worn by a Brother in a Craft Lodge, are those of the Craft Degrees and Royal Arch. No jewels of "the other Degrees" are allowed to be worn in a Craft Lodge, but is needless to say more on this subject as any Brother who attains to the "other degrees" knows well enough and would not make such a mistake. (Sometimes the other degrees are called "Higher Degrees" but this is incorrect there being no higher degree in Craft Masonry than the sublime Degree of Master Mason).

Director of Ceremonies.

Most (if not all) appoint one of the Brethren for this important post. This office should be occupied by a Past Master (but I know of no rule which says he must be a Past Master). not only by reason of his experience gained in serving the various Office, but because a continuity of service in that capacity is most important. Remember the Director of Ceremonies does not have any authority to tell Officers what to do, this authority is vested with the Wor.Master, it would be better for the Master to use his Senior Deacon to deliver his instructions etc. The Director of Ceremonies should not be given the duties that belong to a regular Officer of the Lodge. The D. of C. is not a "regular officer" but is a "permissive Officer" that is not essential under our Constitution. (Rule 37 (b)). But on the other hand he has been appointed or elected and duly invested he ranks between the Secretary and the Senior Deacon. His duties are more or less "To see that the ceremonies of the Lodge are carried out with propriety and decorum, the visitors and brethren are placed according to their value, and the officers at their respective stations".

Attendances.

No excuse, except sickness or the pressing emergencies of public or private vacations, is available as a justification or failure to attend the duties of the Lodge. If a Brother is inviolably prevented from attending, it is important for him to send his apology or excuse to the Master or Secretary of the Lodge. In some Lodges it is his responsibility to arrange a "stand in". Absence without a legitimate excuse means letting the Master down, apart from its not being in accord with a Brother's promise given in his obligation in the Third Degree.

Working Tools.

In some Lodges, when presenting the Working Tools to the Candidate, they are not given to him or each of the tools are handed to the Candidate and taken away from him immediately, this does not seem correct, because he is being presented with the Working Tools not just shown them. It seems absurd to take them away from him immediately after handing them to him, if, you say I present to you etc. then you should put them into his hand, then you should do the same when presenting to the new Master, place them into the Masters hand and take them away when you finish the charge. But, after saying this it is not always possible as in some lodges the Master and his Wardens present the working tools in the second degree and it would be difficult to place these tools in the hand of the candidate.

Signs.

Signs not given correctly or in a slovenly manner make the Ceremonies look "Poor". When the right arm is used for the sign it must be kept straight and the thumb and forefinger in the shape of a square. With the arm parallel, don't allow the elbow to droop down. When the left arm is used it also must be in the shape of a square, with the thumb and forefinger again in the form of a square. In the third we don't recover to the centre. The five points of fellow...p.. the left arm should be straight, not hanging down, thumb and forefinger in the shape of a square.

The third degree sign would appear not to have a squaring motion. But in some lodges this third degree sign is squared. Watch some Brother who gives his signs correctly and follow his example.

Refectory.

The duty here rests with the Director of Ceremonies, to see that all goes correctly, brethren seated in their correct place, visiting Masters with the Worshipful Master. A certain amount a ceremony should be enforced but don't overdo it. Speeches to be kept short, proceedings not to be allowed to drag on and on. Perhaps the first two toasts could be given before the meal and get them out of the way. A short Refectory talk is always nice, as long as it is not allowed to go on and on.

General.

No one may challenge the Worshipful Master. All. (regular ((line))) Officers of the Lodge should be addressed with the name of their office, Brother Senior Warden, etc. Not Worshipful Brother Senior Warden.

The" permissive" Officers should be addressed as Worshipful Brother Secretary, Worshipful Brother Treasurer, etc. and the word "sir" is not used in Masonic Circles. Their is one other point here that before the Lodge is opened the officers should be referred to as Bro.! and I cannot find any reference to using Wor.Bro... in the General Instructions in the front of the Ritual.

There is a saying that the solid mind is in the sound body. It is only when the Lodge is sound in its arrangement. Officers work, harmony, and with perfect adherence to Masonic rule, regulations and etiquette, that the beauty and benefit of our beloved Institution becomes felt and appreciated by the whole world, and our Edifices receives the Mark of Approval from the G.A.O.T.U.

Thank you Worshipful Master and you brethren for the attention you have given me.

M & P.M. Lodge No 130
Miscellany.