

RESPONSIBILITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF A WORSHIPFUL MASTER

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That both responsibilities and opportunities loom very large in the consciousness of a Worshipful Master is axiomatic, but the first very rightly commences long before the Eastern Chair is reached.

It is not always fully understood by the brethren that every candidate for initiation is a potential ruler of the Craft; and we may be remiss in this respect, in not making it crystal clear to the electors that when balloting for any member they are to all intents and purposes selecting a possible Master to reign over them.

That it is well within the rights of every Brother completely to dissociate himself from the ritualistic work of the Lodge, and the history of our order has many most excellent examples of these "flying buttresses" outer supporters, whose influence within the lodge has contributed enormously to the fellowship of the Brethren, yet it is more generally to be assumed that every brother has the intention and most laudable ambition to rule and govern his lodge.

That being the case, responsibility is at all times and in all stations to be enjoined and never more so than when occupying the eminent post of Ruler. Indeed, it might well be stressed in all instruction of the Brethren that from their entrance to our portals they should strive to fit themselves one day to shoulder the heavy responsibilities of Mastership.

Heavy is not too strong a term to employ in this connection, though the implementation of the duties of a Master may be wrought with a heavy or light sense of responsibility, depending upon the individual, and it is something to have in mind that all responsibility is lightsome or burdensome consonant with the attitude of mind brought to the consideration of the task and the degree of cordiality in the relationship created by the bearer of the responsibility with those for whom and for whose endeavours, collectively he is responsible.

It will be conceded that the Master is directly responsible for the government of the Lodge and for the quality of the work exemplified in the Lodge. He is also indirectly responsible for the work of every officer, particularly those two highly important officials, the Secretary and Treasurer. How very essential is it therefore that he himself be fully conversant with the duties of every officer, including the two specifically named.

Here I may be pardoned if I mention a point, a circumstance of some importance vis-a-vis the Master's responsibility for every officer's labours. The system of electing junior as well as senior officers may not be the best for the Lodge, and it is only by sheer accident that a Master finds his staff completely as he would have wished.

In many Jurisdictions three officers only are elected. The Worshipful Master, the Treasurer and the Tyler.

One needs not to seek for reasons for the selection by the Brethren of the Master and Treasurer, and here I feel bound to emphasize the position that the Treasurer is by no means a power to himself by virtue of his election; like all others he is subject to the control, the employment and instruction of the Master.

The Tyler is elected, as in most cases he is a serving brother, in receipt of some tangible recognition of his work, which has within its scope the preparation of the Lodge for all meetings and the care of the property, furniture and regalia of the Lodge.

All other officers are appointed by the incoming Master, who most naturally selects the very best men he can secure and ever with a view of making his year of office successful and the work a pattern for all who come after. I cannot but feel that this right of appointment should be conceded to all Masters, and I doubt not every Master would be careful to ensure that in the selection of the two officers who by virtue of their year of office are eligible for the Mastership, are such as meet with the approval of the Past Masters and will ultimately reflect credit upon their choice.

The responsibility of good government is an all-embracing duty. It can be achieved successfully only by one means, through the affection and esteem of the Brethren.

It is something to wonder at, at times, the loyal obedience of the Brethren to authority: At ease, during recess or at those other times when the Brethren are permitted to indulge in conversation within the lodge, the hubbub of talk and movement ceases immediately upon the sound of the gavel. That is a sincere exemplification of esprit de corps, and earnest desire to submit and obey and it is something which can be counted upon in everything concerning the conduct of the Lodge. But in the wider sphere of government, punctuality, correct demeanour and ready acquiescences, all can be implicitly counted upon when the Master has earned the respect and esteem of his brethren. He may not be a brilliant exponent of the work; he may not be an orator; he may not be able to explain all the idiosyncrasies of abstruse points in rite ceremonial, but if his life and actions, his contact with his brethren and fellows is what we are led to expect from our Rulers, supreme or subordinate, responsibilities rest lightly upon a Master and bring a pleasurable thrill that he has been privileged for his year to rule by love and not by fear, and that his "little day" of authority remains in the minds of his brethren as a happy memory.

Someone once said Napoleon was not himself a great man, and that his success lay in his ability to surround himself by great men, to delegate authority and to be content to direct.

This will appeal to all who have wider authority as the easiest way to rule, but one must know how, and in this as in all else knowledge is power, and again I iterate the absolute necessity for every Master to know the duties and the work of every office or he can never correctly assume the responsibility of his high office.

Opportunities of a Master are unbounded, and are largely self-created. We are so very much akin to a machine which like the manufacturer feels must be constantly employed to justify its cost, we seem to judge our success by the amount of work we can get out of our machine, how many new brethren we can enroll and justify our existence thereby. This afford but little time in which to point the moral to exemplify the precept.

It would be wholly to the benefit of the Craft, to the improvement of the work and the satisfaction of the brethren if opportunities were made for instruction for fellowship and for enquiry.

It was always pleasing at District Meetings to have a question period; but when we consider this is only an annual event and has to serve hundreds of brethren, it might well be extended to every lodge for use at their ordinary meetings. Ample time could be found for this, if the Master took the opportunity to teach the value of time, by punctually commencing labour and conducting the business of his lodge with dispatch.

I believe that a participation in our ceremonies especially in the recital of some of our longer explanations and narratives does tend to make a brother "easy of address"; it stimulates that inferiority complex known as stage fright, and in the case of those desirous of learning an improvement in their mode of speech.

Completely within the scope of Masonic teaching is the art of speaking and it would rebound to the credit of a lodge and its Master if opportunity were afforded of instruction in how to use the voice - how to speak in public. Opportunity should be found also of instruction in visiting. How to give a proof of your standing in the Craft and how to become a visitor ever-welcome. How to propose our toasts and how to reply to them. How to address the chair on various occasions and how better to master the intricacies of one's own particular office and duties.

Instruction of this kind should be general. The duties of a Secretary should be explained to all, as only when one is "au fait" with a task is one able to say if acceptance of that task is within the compass of one's attainment, and that goes for every office and duty.

These all come within the realm of opportunities afforded by the Master and then there are the opportunities to refer to which may seem platitudinarism, the opportunities for doing good. These are of course, unending and always at hand. They may not be restricted to the material assistance usually associated with this "doing good". The moral needs of men are perhaps more imperatively necessary and yet less attention by reason of their personality.

A brother said to me some time ago, "Brother Jones has ambitions but is running around with Brother Smith's wife." I asked "Have you spoken to Brother Jones about this?" "No", he said. "Then do so", I rejoined. "He is the man to speak to about this, not me, or any other Brother." This is the opportunity a Master may well embrace. Not easy, but altogether worthwhile if handled carefully and without guile.

The ready and willing obedience I have already referred to connotes a further readiness to be led, to be instructed, to be won. And this prepares the ground as it were, for the opportunities a Master should seek in the interests of the Craft, and the individual Brother.

From his elevation above his fellows, actual physically and symbolically potential, he can observe and appraise the labours and the life of every Brother, and from the evidence thus adduced should create opportunities of dealing with whatever is praiseworthy no less than what is amiss. One may gauge the standard of a Brother from his demeanour in the Lodge, his hallowed surroundings for we must never

forget a duly constituted Lodge is also a Consecrated assembly opened in the name of the Most High God. With that in mind the true Master never ceases to impress that thought upon himself and his Lodge and find opportunities of shouldering every responsibility that peace, harmony and brotherly love may prevail and relief afforded to the necessities of all, material, moral and spiritual.

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