

WHAT SHALL WE TELL THE CANDIDATE?

A Guide For Proposers, Seconders And Candidates

By Bro. J. R. Dashwood

[Editorial Note: Some years before his death in 1961, our Bro. John R. Dashwood compiled a little pamphlet under the title, An Outline of Freemasonry, which was designed for distribution to prospective Candidates as a helpful introduction to the Society which they were seeking to enter. It was published anonymously "By A Ceylon Past Master", and, as his successor, I had long been anxious to have the piece reprinted and made available for easy distribution.

The recent ruling on Penalties, in the Grand Lodge, December 9th, 1964, and the Grand Lodge Circular which followed it in January, 1965, have raised several new and important matters affecting the perennial question, "What may we tell the Candidate?" Indeed, the Circular indicates that prospective Candidates, nowadays, ought to be advised on these matters, which need to be discussed with particular care.

*In the hope, therefore, that this publication will be of some value to Lodge Secretaries and to future Proposers, Seconders and Candidates, I have dared to enlarge Bro. Dashwood's paper by the addition of a few paragraphs (marked *), leaving his own work intact, apart from a minor amendment to his final paragraph.*

Freemasons are forbidden to canvas for recruits. All applications for admission to the Order must be entirely voluntary and the initiative must come from the prospective Candidate himself. However, it is obvious that, although a man may be attracted by what he has heard about the Craft or by having relations or friends who belong to it, he would naturally wish to have some fuller information about it before offering himself for membership. It is not always easy for a Mason to know how to reply to, enquiries, or how much he may properly reveal, and he is likely to err on the side of over-caution. This pamphlet, therefore, is intended to provide a simple answer which can be put into the hands of any enquirer.

Freemasonry is in no sense a Secret Society. This is not to deny that it has secrets, but there is nothing in any way secret about its meeting places, its membership, its aims and principles, or even to some extent about its methods. Indeed, the ideals and teachings of Masonry cannot be too widely known.

Freemasonry has been defined as "A Speculative Science founded upon an Operative Art"; that is, it is descended directly from the mediaeval associations of working masons, but has now for more than two centuries ceased to have any direct connection with the building trade. It would be folly to claim that our present system is the same as, or even corresponds very closely to, the organization and methods of the mediaeval craftsmen. Growth and change are symptoms of life, and the fact that Freemasonry is very much a living association indicates that it has undergone extensive change and expansion, and is still subject to growth, though without alteration of essentials.

Our fraternity seems to have had its rise from the time of the Gilds, soon after the Norman conquest ; but since the masons' work lay mainly outside towns they did not form Gilds normally, but "Lodges", attached to a particular quarry or building. Their aims, however, were very similar to those of the Gilds, namely, to regulate the trade, to inculcate a standard of morals and behaviour, and to impart certain trade knowledge to the younger members ;¹ while, in view of the migratory character of their occupation, esoteric methods of differentiation and recognition were probably introduced quite early.

The Lodge was primarily the masons' workshop and was entirely separate from their dwelling houses. It was not, however, solely a workshop; it had considerable social aspects, for there the masons took their midday meal and their afternoon siesta. From very early days secrecy as to all matters that occurred in the Lodge was enjoined, and the early teachings of the Lodge were probably not formulated in writing, but were entirely oral.

The earliest Masonic manuscripts now extant date from about A.D. 1400 and are known as the Regius and Cooke Manuscripts. Both contain the injunction to secrecy on Lodge matters, and both show that, even in these early times, the Lodges admitted members who were not working masons ; and, as time went on, the admission of these non-operative or "Accepted" Masons increased. The books of the Masons' Company of London show that early in the seventeenth century there was an inner circle of Speculative Masonry within the Company known as the "Acception", and it was probably a meeting of this Speculative

Lodge which the antiquary Elias Ashmole attended in 1682, thirty-five years after his Initiation.

During the latter half of the seventeenth century the Operative element in the Lodges appears to have got steadily weaker and the Speculative stronger, until, by the end of the century, many, perhaps most, of the Lodges were predominantly Speculative.

In the year 1717, four Lodges in London came to an agreement among themselves to set up a central authority "for the better regulation of the Craft, in the cities of London and Westminster", which they called a Grand Lodge. This, the first of all Grand Lodges, contemplated no wider jurisdiction than the immediate environs of London, but, thanks to the wise decisions to which they guided the Lodges, Freemasonry has spread throughout the entire world. One of the most far-reaching measures was the dissociation of the Craft, which had hitherto been closely bound up with the national Church, from any one specific form of creed. The rule then laid down holds good today.

"Let a man's religion be what it may, he is not excluded from the order, provided he believe in the glorious architect of heaven and earth, and practise the sacred duties of morality. Thus Masonry is the centre of union between good men and true, and the happy means of conciliating friendship amongst those who must otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance."²

The Grand Lodge, thus modestly begun in 1717, soon made its influence felt and its authority acknowledged, not only all over England, but also in many places abroad. Ireland in 1725 and Scotland in 1736 followed the example set and formed their own Grand Lodges, and this process continued all over the world, until today there are approximately a hundred Sovereign Grand Lodges recognized by the Grand Lodge of England. Besides these there are other "Grand" bodies, notably on the Continent and in some of the Latin-American countries, which are not recognized, owing to their having allowed themselves to become mixed up with politics, or having ceased to require a belief in the Supreme Being as a necessary qualification for membership. By the ruling of Grand Lodge, no Masonic communication may be held with the members of such organizations by genuine Masons.

Soon after the formation of the first Grand Lodge the Lodges had become entirely speculative. "Thus this heritage of the middle ages belongs now neither to the Architects nor to the Stonemasons, but has passed into the possession of others, who have every reason to be proud of their ancient traditions, even if they no longer discharge the main functions for which their fraternity was originally established."³

Turning from the history of the Craft to consider the nature and aims of the Fraternity, the following is an official pronouncement issued in August, 1938, by the Grand Lodge of England: —

AIMS AND RELATIONSHIPS OF THE CRAFT

1. From time to time the United Grand Lodge of England has deemed it desirable to set forth in precise form the aims of Freemasonry as consistently practised under its Jurisdiction since it came into being as an organized body in 1717, and also to define the principles governing its relations with those other Grand Lodges with which it is in fraternal accord.
2. In view of representations which have been received, and of statements recently issued which have distorted or obscured the true objects of Freemasonry, it is once again considered necessary to emphasize certain fundamental principles of the Order.
3. The first condition of admission into, and membership of, the Order is a belief in the Supreme Being. This is essential and admits of no compromise.
4. The Bible, referred to by Freemasons as the Volume of the Sacred Law, is always open in the Lodges. Every candidate is required to take his Obligation on that book or on the Volume which is held by his particular creed to impart sanctity to an oath or promise taken upon it.
5. Everyone who enters Freemasonry is, at the outset, strictly forbidden to countenance any act which may have a tendency to subvert the peace and good order of society ; he must pay due obedience to the law of any state in which he resides or which may afford him protection, and he must never be remiss in the allegiance due to the Sovereign of his native land.

6. While English Freemasonry thus inculcates in each of its members the duties of loyalty and citizenship, it reserves to the individual the right to hold his own opinion with regard to public affairs. But neither in any Lodge, nor at any time in his capacity as a Freemason, is he permitted to discuss or to advance his views on theological or political questions.
7. The Grand Lodge has always consistently refused to express any opinion on questions of foreign or domestic state policy either at home or abroad and it will not allow its name to be associated with any action, however humanitarian it may appear to be, which infringes its unalterable policy of standing aloof from every question affecting the relations between one government and another, or between political parties, or questions as to rival theories of government.
8. The Grand Lodge is aware that there do exist Bodies, styling themselves Freemasons, which do not adhere to these principles, and while that attitude exists the Grand Lodge of England refuses absolutely to have any relations with such Bodies, or to regard them as Freemasons.
9. The Grand Lodge of England is a Sovereign and independent Body practising Freemasonry only within the three Degrees and only within the limits defined in its Constitution as 'pure Antient Masonry'. It does not recognize or admit the existence of any superior Masonic authority, however styled.
10. One more than one occasion the Grand Lodge has refused, and will continue to refuse, to participate in Conferences with so-called International Associations claiming to represent Freemasonry, which admit to membership Bodies failing to conform strictly to the principles upon which the Grand Lodge of England is founded. The Grand Lodge does not admit any such claim, nor can its views be represented by any such Association.
11. There is no secret with regard to any of the basic principles of Freemasonry, some of which have been stated above. The Grand Lodge will always consider the recognition of those Grand Lodges which profess and practise, and can show that they have consistently professed and practised, those established and unaltered principles, but in no circumstances will it enter into discussion with a view to any new or varied interpretation of them. They must be accepted and practised wholeheartedly and in their entirety by those who desire to be recognized as Freemasons by the United Grand Lodge of England.

The Grand Lodge of England has been asked if it still stands by this declaration, particularly in regard to paragraph 7. The Grand Lodge of England replied that it stood by every word of the declaration, and has since asked for the opinion of the Grand Lodges of Ireland and Scotland. A conference has been held between the three Grand Lodges, and all unhesitatingly reaffirm the statement that was pronounced in 1938: nothing in present-day affairs has been found that could cause them to recede from that attitude.

If Freemasonry once deviated from its course by expressing an opinion on political or theological questions, it would be called upon not only publicly to approve or denounce any movement which might arise in the future, but would sow the seeds of discord among its own members.

The three Grand Lodges are convinced that it is only by this rigid adherence to this policy that Freemasonry has survived the constantly changing doctrines of the outside world, and are compelled to place on record their complete disapproval of any action which may tend to permit the slightest departure from the basic principles of Freemasonry. They are strongly of opinion that if any of the three Grand Lodges does so, it cannot maintain a claim to, be following the Antient Landmarks of the Order, and must ultimately face disintegration.⁴

*So much for the historical background and the official aims of the Craft. The remainder of this pamphlet discusses your own relationship to, the Institution, as a prospective Candidate.

*You will have heard already that if you decide to, join a Lodge and you are accepted, your admission will be arranged in the course of a series of ceremonies which have come down to the Craft during the past 250 years at least some portions of the ritual and procedure are even considerably older than that. They are of a deeply religious character, very solemn and impressive, and full of old inherited customs.

*Each of the ceremonies has, as one of its central themes, an Obligation or Oath and, collectively,

they embrace the duties of secrecy, fidelity, service to the Craft and to our fellows in the world at large.

*The traditional penalties of the Obligations serve as a basis for the various “modes of recognition”, the latter being themselves closely connected with the symbolism which runs through the whole teaching of Freemasonry.

*Because the Craft has preserved those traditional penalties in practically the same words as were used 250 years ago, their repetition may cause you some surprise, but they have been retained—and you will be asked to bear them in mind—only in order to emphasize the solemnity of the Obligation. The physical penalties, as such, are not, and never were, enforced.

*It is necessary that these matters should be explained to you before your Initiation, so that you will have a proper grasp of the implications of the Obligations and of the manner in which they are administered. If you have any doubts or questions on the subject, do not hesitate to ask, and your Proposer will answer them as far as he may.

It can hardly be sufficiently emphasized that Freemasonry is in no sense an Insurance or Benefit Society. No member of the Craft has any right to financial assistance from his Lodge, or from the Craft in general, or from any individual member of it. Indeed, the exact opposite is the case, for the Order is purely altruistic, and, before a man can be admitted to it, he must sign a statement that he anticipates NO pecuniary benefit from his membership. The annual subscriptions to a Lodge bear no relation to insurance premia, being strictly analogous to ordinary club subscriptions, and are used to, cover the expenses of the Lodge, such as rent, lighting, taxes, stationery, etc.

Another thing which Freemasonry is NOT is a convivial Club. It is true that, from convenience and to encourage good-fellowship, it is frequently the custom for the members of a Lodge to dine together before or after their meeting; but this is no inherent part of Freemasonry, and there are many Lodges which have been specifically founded as non-dining and temperance Lodges.

“Every true Masonic Lodge is dedicated to God and His service. Each Candidate declares his belief in the Supreme Being. Guidance from on high is sought step by step. Keeping strictly aloof from all doctrinal differences and political divisions, Freemasonry demands of all its members, whatever their race, tongue or creed, a recognition of the Eternal and of the Light which comes from above; loyalty to their Country and obedience to its laws, with strict regard for the rights and liberties of their fellow-men.”⁵

Freemasonry is set in a religious and moral context, but itself is not in any way a religion.

“Theological discussion inside the Lodge or in association with Masonic gatherings is strictly forbidden. Party politics are also taboo in Lodges, and their association in any form with Masonry is against rule.

We fraternize for the purpose of social intercourse, of mutual assistance, of Charity to the distressed, of goodwill to all. No Freemason would pretend that every member of the Craft fully lives up to, its ideals, just as no Christian feels his creed undermined because all its professors are not patterns of virtue.”⁶

Our rules, however, enjoin that all proposers and seconders of Candidates for Freemasonry should exercise great care to see that their nominee is a good man and true and strictly respects the moral law. Masonry itself is calculated to bring out all that is best in a man so that we can expect in the social side of the Craft to enjoy the society of our fellows under peculiarly favourable circumstances.

The fundamental principles of Freemasonry are stated to be “Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth

The first may rightly be understood as CHARITY, not in the limited financial sense of the word, but the all-embracing Charity described in I Corinthians, 13. We should approach Freemasonry for the purpose of helping others and, while so doing, enjoying the society of other men of high moral character actuated by similar ideas, and associating together with the intention of being happy and communicating happiness.

A Mason is said to be “Brother to a King, fellow to a Prince or to a beggar if a Mason and found worthy.: In Lodge we are all equal, in the sense that all have equal rights and an equal voice in the management of Lodge affairs. But Masonry does not detract from the honour or rank that a member may already possess, nor does it encourage its members to take advantage of their Brotherhood to insinuate themselves

into places which would otherwise be closed to them. Not only should the aspirant to Freemasonry anticipate no financial benefit to himself or his family, but he should also understand that he may not presume on his membership to promote his interests in life. He must not use Masonry in any way to, advertise his trade or calling, nor must he hope that it will cause his superiors to view shortcomings with a lenient eye or recommend him for undeserved promotion.

Conversely, it may be asked to what extent it is his duty to advance the interests of a Brother? Only so far as such help may be given without injuring a third party. We must not allow it to affect the welfare of even our own immediate family. To what extent should a Brother receive preference over a non-mason? To the extent only that, if in every particular other things are equal, the fact of one being a Mason should be allowed to weigh down the scale ; but the fact that a man who asks a favour is a Mason must never outweigh our duty to our employer, or to our shareholders, or to the general public.

Masonry stands for tolerance, broadmindedness, unselfishness—in fine, CHARITY. The quotation used in another connection may well be held to epitomize Freemasonry: —

“In things essential, unity; in things non-essential, diversity; in all things, Charity.”

Finally, the financial aspect should be borne in mind. Anyone desiring to become a Mason should know first what it will cost him in admission fee, cost of “clothing” and annual subscription; he should be satisfied in his own mind that he can afford, without detriment to himself or his family, not only these sums, but also contributions within reason towards the succour of those less fortunate than himself. The cost of admission and membership varies considerably in different places and in different Lodges. In England the initiation fee must not be less than five guineas ; outside England, not less than three guineas; but the individual Lodge may decide that it shall be more than these sums. ⁸The subscription to each Lodge is decided by its members and both fee for initiation and the subscription are specified in its By-laws.

Anyone into whose hands this pamphlet comes will be either a Mason or an enquirer who has already approached a friend for information about the Craft, and it is hoped that what has been written may help the latter to decide whether he would be the happier for becoming a member and whether he possesses the necessary qualification to become a good Mason.

Should you, after mature consideration, desire to apply for admission to the Craft, your application must be made in writing on a Proposal Form, which will be supplied by the Secretary of the Lodge that you hope to, join—and your Proposer or the Lodge Secretary will also furnish any further information that you may need.

1. Cf. Knoop & Jones, *An Introduction to Freemasonry*.
2. Ancient Charges No. 1.
3. Knoop & Jones, *An Introduction to Freemasonry*.
4. The three final paragraphs were Accepted by Grand Lodge“ in September, 1949. (Ed.)
5. [text omitted]
6. Robbins, *English-speaking Freemasonry*.
7. First Lecture, First Section.
8. They tend to be considerably larger nowadays. (Ed.)