

## The Master of a Lodge

The early speculative lodges enjoyed great independence, much of which they have bequeathed to the lodges of today. In addition to electing its own Master, each lodge regulates its own proceedings, and has an undoubted right to do so providing it acts consistently with the general laws and regulations of the Craft. It frames its own bylaws (they need the approval of the Grand Master), appoints standing committees and audit committees to assist the Master in ordering the business of the lodge, but in a number of matters - all making for uniformity and for the prevention of irregularities - observes certain regulations of Grand Lodge. Such regulations include the limitation of the number of candidates on any one occasion, except by dispensation; the holding of only one meeting of the lodge on any one day; the holding of an emergency meeting only when a dispensation has been granted; the necessity of each lodge keeping a minute book; etc.

The custom in every lodge of electing by ballot a new Master each year is of time-immemorial, although there is evidence to show that in many eighteenth-century lodges Masters were elected to serve for six instead of twelve months. The Master is elected from those members of the lodge who have served the office of Master or Warden, or who, in very exceptional cases, have been rendered eligible by dispensation. The Old MS. Charges appear to indicate that the Master, many centuries ago, was simply an experienced craftsman presiding over the lodge, and, so far as we can see, the idea of his ruling his lodge by virtue of his possession of peculiar secrets was not within the comprehension of our ancient brethren; but in this matter there is room for many different opinions. The same appears to apply to the old Scottish lodges. Today, in the speculative lodges throughout the world, the Master is one who has been elected to the office by his brethren, and who has passed through a special ceremony of Installation, in the course of which secrets peculiar to the Master's chair have been communicated to him; but essentially the Master must always be a Brother who is well qualified by years of service as a member and officer of the lodge to govern his Brethren with wise understanding. The rule that the Master should first have served as a Warden is also an old one. It was not always observed in the early speculative lodges, but it goes right back into the history of the craft guilds from which masonry draws its system of government by Masters and Wardens. Every Master in the old days, as in the new, solemnly pledged himself to observe the ancient usages and established customs, and strictly to enforce them within his lodge. It is he who is responsible for the due observance of the masonic laws by the lodge over which he presides.

We pay respect to the ruler of the lodge by addressing him as "Worshipful Master". On an earlier page it was pointed out that to be "worshipful" is to be "honoured". Thus the "Worshipful" Master is the "Honoured" Master, even as the magistrate is "Your Worship", or, in other words, "Your Honour". In a great many lodges in the eighteenth-century the Master was "Right Worshipful", a form of address now the exclusive privilege of certain Grand Officers. The custom of calling the Master "Right Worshipful Master" ceased about the time of the union in 1813, although we find it used in a Kendal Lodge up to 1819. Outside freemasonry the use of the term "Right Worshipful" must be of ancient standing, for in Pepys's Diary for August 4, 1661, a clergyman addresses his congregation as "Right Worshipful and Dearly Beloved." Grand Masters have always had the right of visiting a lodge within their jurisdiction, and, if they so wished, of presiding on the occasion of their visit. This right is enjoyed by the Pro Grand Master as well as the Deputy and Assistant Grand Master and by the Provincial and District Grand Master. With a brother of such exalted rank in the chair, the Master of the lodge sits to his immediate left, whereas when, as is sometimes the case, the Master of the lodge gives up his chair to a Past Master to work a ceremony, he sits on that Past Master's immediate right, or, it may be, to the right of any Grand Officer having a prior right to preside.

Scots lodges have a Depute Master, but the English Master nowadays has no deputy known by that name, although some of the eighteenth-century lodges had regular Deputy Masters, the first mention of the office being thought to occur in the minutes of the Druidical Lodge of Rotherham, Yorkshire, in the year 1779, a lodge under the York Grand Lodge. Of course, in a sense, the Senior Warden, and failing him, the Junior Warden is the Deputy Master, but neither of these brethren, if not an Installed Master, can confer a degree in an English lodge, although (remaining in his own chair) he may preside over the lodge should the need arise. In the Master's absence a degree can be conferred on a Candidate only by an Installed Master, whether a member of the lodge or not.

The Master is assisted in carrying on the work of the lodge by his officers, two of whom - the Treasurer and the Tyler - are elected, the former by ballot; all other officers being appointed by the Master. In an English lodge his regular officers are two Wardens, a Treasurer, a Secretary, two Deacons, an Inner Guard and a Tyler; additional officers are a Chaplain, a Director of Ceremonies and his assistant, an Almoner, an Organist, and Assistant Secretary and Stewards, but no others. A Brother can hold only one regular office at one and the same time, but may in addition be appointed by the Master to one "additional" office. On members declining office - including Masters-elect - many old lodges imposed fines graduated in amount to the importance of the office.

The precise position of the Immediate Past Master, who is not an "officer of the lodge", is often a matter for debate. Grand Lodge prescribes that, as regards precedence, the Immediate Past Master comes immediately in front of the Chaplain, or, if there be no Chaplain, then immediately in front of the Treasurer; whereas, by decision of the Board of General Purposes, the name of the Immediate Past Master in a printed list comes immediately after that of the Master and before his officers. The appointment of a lodge Chaplain in 1769 is known, but it could hardly have been the first of its kind.

With regard to the Almoner, the alms-crest was a box provided in church to receive contributions; in a masonic lodge it is the charity box which provides the funds with which the lodge Almoner relieves any Brother, sometimes members of a Brother's family, who need help. Originally the Almoner was an officer in a monastery. At St. Paul's Cathedral, in London, he distributed the alms, had the care of the burial of the poor, and educated boys in music and literature for the service of the Church. The Almonries in the principal monasteries were often great establishments, with accommodation for the poor and infirm.

Many old guilds regularly relieved distressed Brethren and their families, and there are records in the fourteenth century of an amount of seven-pence per week (say, two or three days wages) being allowed a member of the Lincoln Guild of Tailors. In the same century a London trade, the Skinners, also paid that sum from their alms-box to any member who should fall into poverty through old age or ill health. There is no doubt that the lodge charity box, probably suggested by the alms-box of the guilds, was known far back in the eighteenth century. In a Sheffield lodge much earlier, there was a rule that:

on each Stated Lodge meeting every Member shall spend and put sixpence into the Chest for the relief of distressed Freemasons, That the Junior Warden shall keep an exact acct of the reckoning...upon his negligence or omission he shall be accountable for the deficiency.

The early lodges of the eighteenth century had their own methods of raising charity funds, for we find the Old King's Alms Lodge, No.28, ordering in October 1733, a ticket to be bought in "the present lottery in hopes of success as heretofore for the sake of charity." In the following July the ticket "was reported to have come up a blank".