

HONORS FROM THE CRAFT

“Freemasonry regards no man for his worldly wealth or honors.” In her lodges all men meet on the level. That she should provide elaborate and ceremonious honors in many forms for those who love and labor for the Craft is one of the delightful inconsistencies of the Order!

These orders are of several kinds - ceremonious, as in the receptions; salutary from the brethren to the Worshipful Master and to the Grand Master; titular when the brother honored receives the permanent right to the use of a Masonic title, usually accompanied by certain rights and privileges, and symbolic, when the recipient is presented with a decoration, emblem or other device to be worn upon proper occasions.

Highest of the salutary honors are the Grand honors; usually given upon four occasions; the visit to the lodge of a Grand Master, or a Deputy Grand Master acting for him; installations of Grand Masters and Worshipful Masters, the dedication of a Masonic Hall or Temple and the constitution of a new lodge. Their manner is esoteric and therefore cannot be described here.

Any who have read a history of the manners and customs of ancient Rome will at once see a resemblance between the prescribed form of both our private and public Grand Honors, and the carefully restricted and formal methods of laudation and applause practiced in those days.

In this modern era, applause by clapping the hands is common to the theater, the concert hall and the lecture room; such applause as is given at a baseball or football game would be considered ill-bred in a theater. In ancient Rome applause was even more particularly formal. Three kinds of laudation with the hands were prescribed to express various degrees of enthusiasm. “Bombi” was given by striking the cupped hands gently and frequently, a crowd thus produced a humming sound. “Imbrices” was similar to our usual applause, hands struck smartly palm to palm; while “Testae” was produced by hitting the palm of the left hand with the fingers of the right hand grouped to a point, producing a hollow sound (when done by many) something like that made by hitting a hollow vessel.

Freemasonry’s private Grand Honors given at corner-stone layings and funerals - crossing the arms on the breast, raising them over the head and dropping them to the sides - have evidently the same classical origin. The three motions are repeated three times; there is thus a succession of nine blows, as hands strike shoulders, strike each other overhead and strike thighs. This feature makes intelligible the phrase occasionally used “giving honors of three times three.” (There are different honors for this in Nevada.)

It is unnecessary (and illegal) to dwell upon the familiar salutes to the Master in the lodge room, since every Mason who can enter a lodge must know their origin and allusions. Suffice it to say here that when offered to a Worshipful Master, they but emphasize the respect and veneration which the Craft pays to the Oriental Chair, looking to its occupant for wisdom, guidance and counsel. Happy the brother in the East who deserves all the respect shown his office.

Conferring honorary membership in a lodge or Grand Lodge is a method of honoring a brother the greater, as its bestowal is rare. It is more common on the continent than in England or the United States. Some lodges provide in their By-Laws for a definite number of honorary memberships, which cannot be exceeded without the trouble and inconvenience of an amendment. Other lodges refuse to consider thus honoring a brother. In a few instances honorary members pay dues. The lodge honoring them thus puts them on a parity with its own members in everything but the right to ballot on petitions and in elections, and the right to hold office. In some lodges honorary membership carries with it the privilege of the floor (under the pleasure of the Master); in others, it is a mere gesture and carries no inherent rights.

The gift of life membership by a lodge to one of its own members is an honor, indeed. By so doing the lodge says to the recipient:

“You are so beloved among us; your services to us and to the Craft have been so great that we desire to relieve you from the payment of dues for the rest of your life.” Life Memberships, as honors, are often presented in the form of a “Good Standing Card” made of gold, suitably engraved.

Inasmuch as financial experience has demonstrated that disposing of life memberships by purchase is often an unwise policy for lodges which give life memberships but rarely. When really earned by some outstanding service to a lodge, or to Masonry, life membership is among the most distinguished honor which can be conferred upon a brother.

It is the custom in most lodges to honor the retiring Worshipful Master with a jewel of the office he is then assuming, the honorable and honored station of Past Master. The jewel of the Past Master in the United States is universally the compasses (“compass” in six jurisdictions!) open sixty degrees upon an arc of the fourth part of a circle, and the legs of the compasses inclosing the sun. In England the Past Master’s jewel was formerly the square on a quadrant, but is now a square from which is suspended the 47th problem of Euclid.

Not all lodges give their Past Masters jewels as they become Past Masters. Failure to do so usually comes either from a lack of understanding that “Past Master” is something more than a mere empty title, or by finances too modest to stand the strain.

“Past Master” is not only a name given to the brother who has served his lodge in the East, when he makes way for his successor in office, but is also an honorary degree which all newly elected Masters must receive before they can legally be installed. The Past Master’s degree is given in the Chapter of Capitular Masonry, or in an Emergent Lodge of Past Masters called for that purpose. This requirement is very old - certainly as old, or older than the Mother Grand Lodge - and is universal in England and the United States.

Whether the degree is conferred in a Chapter or an Emergent Lodge of Past Masters, the recipient (who thus becomes a “virtual Past Master” before he is actually installed as Worshipful Master) is taught many esoteric lessons regarding his conduct while in the Oriental Chair. Past Masters are usually members of Grand Lodge, but, according to the most eminent Masonic authorities, not by inherent right but by the local regulations of their own Grand Lodge. In some

Grand Lodges Past Masters have individual votes; in others they have only a fraction of a vote; all the Past Masters from any one lodge being given one whole vote between them.

The fact that a Past Master must receive that degree before he became an Installed Master, and that he is a member of Grand Lodge is evidence that the title is not empty. As it confers privileges, it also requires the performance of duties. The honor is in the state; the jewel is but the expression of the lodge's appreciation of that honor. To most brethren their Past Masters' jewel is their "Master's Wages" to be cherished as, perhaps, the greatest honor which can ever be given them.

An additional honor usually accorded Past Masters is a special word of welcome extended by the Worshipful Master, who may, and often does, invite them to seats in the East. This is a courtesy entirely under the Worshipful master's control. It is not required that he invite his predecessors to sit with him; neither is he forbidden to invite anyone in the lodge to sit in the East.

Another honor the Worshipful Master has wholly in his discretion is offering the gavel to a distinguished visitor. Usually this is reserved for the Grand Master or the Deputy Grand Master acting in his place, who are received with the lodge standing. In tendering such a distinguished visitor the Gavel the Worshipful Master says in effect: "In full knowledge of your wisdom I trust you to preside over my lodge." The recipient of such an honor usually receives the gavel, seats the lodge, and returns it immediately to the Master. What to do with the brother who has served his lodge in some one capacity for so many years that he can neither successfully carry the burden longer nor decline the honor of re-election or appointment, has troubled many a Master. Borrowing the title Emeritus from the classic custom of universities may solve the problem.

Emeritus comes from the latin word "emerere," meaning "to be greatly deserving." The Secretary, Treasurer or Tiler who has served for a generation and now wishes to retire, may be appointed or elected "Treasurer Emeritus", "Secretary Emeritus", "Tiler Emeritus," etc.

Such an honor says in effect: "You have served so long and so well that we cannot dispense with your services or your experience, but we wish you to enjoy them without burdening you with the cares of office. Therefore we give you the title and the honor and relieve you of the labor." If salaried officers are retired with the title Emeritus, continuing their salary for life makes the honor practical. Receptions in lodges differ in different Jurisdictions, but all such honors express respect and veneration. Thus a Grand Master may be received by the Marshall, the Deacons and the Stewards. Escorted to the East, the Worshipful Master receives him, accords him the Grand Honors (Private or Public as is the case) and tenders the gavel. Less distinguished Grand Lodge officers may be received with the Marshall and Deacons only, Marshall and Stewards only, Marshall only, or with the lodge standing, without any escort. It is wise to adhere strictly to the form of reception prescribed by local regulations and never to offer such honors to any brethren not specified by regulations as entitled to them. To use them promiscuously is to lessen their dignity and their effectiveness.

If election as Worshipful Master is the greatest honor which a lodge may confer upon a brother, election to the "foot of the line" or appointment to any office in the line under the discretion of the Master, is less an honor by but a few degrees, since it is usual, though not invariable, that the

brother who begins at the bottom ends at the top. Whatever his future career may be, at least either lodge or Master has said to the brother who thus takes service in the official family of his lodge: "We trust you; we believe in you; we expect that you will demonstrate that we are right when we say we think in time you will be worthy to be Master of this lodge."

Selection for membership on either of the four most important committees a Master may appoint; upon charity or upon trials, is a great honor. For these committees the Master naturally selects only brethren of wisdom, experience, knowledge and an unselfish willingness to serve.

Masonry honors her dead. Masonic funeral services conducted over the remains of a deceased brother show his surviving relatives and friends that we are mindful of his worth. As such, the ceremonies we conduct at the grave are an honor and should be so considered. Occasionally arises the problem of the active, hard-working brother, who has done much for the lodge, but who has never held an office, or who, if a Past Master, has received his jewel. Brethren become lodge instructors; serve for years upon the finance committee, are selected Lodge Trustees or whose advice and counsel is so valued that it is frequently sought. After long service of this kind a lodge may desire to express its affection in some concrete way.

The presentation Apron is one very pretty solution of this problem. Presentation Aprons may be obtained from Masonic regalia supply houses with any degree of elaboration and at any cost desired. They are particularly effective for bestowal upon brethren who have served more than one year as Master. It detracts from, not adds to, the value of a Past Master's Jewel to present any brother with two or more of them! The presentation apron with the Past Master's Emblem worked in gold embroidery upon it, is a graceful honor which can be worn in the Mother Lodge, or in lodges visited, and is cherished by all who receive it.

Every brother is familiar with the solemn words with which an Entered Apprentice receives his lambskin or white leather apron - "More Honorable Than the Star and Garter, or any other order - ." An honor, indeed, but sometimes less appreciated than it deserves because it is given to so many; given, indeed, to all who are permitted to knock upon the West Gate.

This honor differs from a Past Master's jewel, or other permanent honors which Freemasonry may bestow, in this vital particular; it is given before the performance. Others come as a recognition of labor done and a Master's Wages earned. The apron may become a great and distinguished honor, or it may be "merely a piece of white lambskin." Which it will become is wholly in the power of the recipient to say.

When worthily worn, only one grant from Freemasonry may exceed it in value - the honor of being raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason. Here, too, the honor comes before the work. But if the work is done, if the wages are earned, if the newly made brother does indeed live according to the precepts of the Fraternity, then at long last, even if he has received the jewel of a Past Master - he will agree, and his brethren will unite in saying that there is no honor which Freemasonry can give to any man that is greater than that which lies in the simple words: "He is a true Master Mason."