

LODGE AND GRAND LODGE ORGANIZATION

All Master Masons should be familiar with the organization and government of the Craft. Yet, only occasionally is instruction in these subjects given to the newly-raised Master Mason. He is required to attain a sufficient proficiency in the esoteric work of the preceding degrees, and some Jurisdictions insist upon a proficiency in the Master's degree, but information regarding the structure of Freemasonry is left to time and chance in far too many cases.

To become a Freemason of his own free will and without solicitation, a man makes a written application, which is duly endorsed or recommended by brethren of the lodge to which he applies. His application is laid before the lodge for acceptance, or rejection. If accepted, the Worshipful Master appoints a committee, the duty of which is to satisfy itself of the applicant's fitness to be a Mason. After a certain period of time (usually a month), the report of the committee is read to the lodge, and a ballot taken on the application. A unanimously favorable ballot elects the applicant to receive the degrees, or, in some Jurisdictions, just the First Degree. He is initiated into the First or Entered Apprentice Degree, attains a suitable proficiency in the esoteric work, waits a month or more, is Passed to the Second or Fellowcraft Degree, again attains a suitable proficiency in its works, waits another month or so, and finally is Raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason.

Before any of these steps can be taken, there must be what is called in some Jurisdictions a "just, perfect and regular lodge," in others a "just and regularly constituted lodge," to which the petitions can be made, and in which the degrees may be conferred.

Before such a lodge can come into existence, there must be a Grand Lodge, or governing body of all private, the particular, or the subordinate lodges (they are called by all three names in different places) to give a Warrant of Constitution, or Charter, to certain brethren, empowering them to work and to be a Masonic Lodge. The age-old question which has plagued philosophers; did the first hen lay the first egg, or did the first egg hatch into the first hen; may seem to apply here, since before there can be a Grand Lodge, there must be two or more private lodges to form it! But this Bulletin is written of conditions as they exist in the United States today - and indeed, in almost all the civilized world - and not of the historical conditions which pertained in 1717 when the four lodges in London formed the first grand Lodge!

Today no regularly constituted lodge can come into existence without the consent of an existing Grand Lodge. It is certain that other Grand Lodges will be formed in the future, but they probably will not be many. Let us suppose that Commander Byrd should discover a habitable continent at the South Pole. This continent slowly fills up with adventurers, travelers and pioneers. Some of them will be Masons. They then ask the consent of some Grand Lodge permission to form a lodge - Massachusetts, for instance, has five lodges in China.

Some English Brethren, let us suppose, receive a Charter for a lodge in Antarctica from the Mother Grand Lodge of England. Perhaps the Grand Lodge of Texas Charters another lodge in "Byrdland." After a while these lodges unite to form their own Grand Lodge; the Grand Lodges which have Chartered them relinquish jurisdiction, and a new Grand Lodge is born. But most civilized countries now do have Grand Lodges; the great formative period of Grand Lodges - the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries - is practically over. Therefore we may consider that most of our hens are grown up and laying, and that the vast majority of new lodges which are hatched will grow up to be chicks of the mother, and not start out to form other Grand Lodges for themselves! It is not contended that no new Grand Lodges will ever be formed, but only that less will come into being in the future than have in the past.

A Grand Lodge, then, is formed of particular lodges; the Masters, or the Masters and Wardens of which, then represent their lodges in the meetings of the Grand Lodge.

The private or particular lodge usually comes into being when a certain number of brethren, in good standing, will petition a Grand Master to form a lodge. The Grand Master, if it his pleasure, issues a Dispensation to these brethren which forms them into a provisional lodge, or a lodge "Under dispensation." The powers of this Lodge Under Dispensation are strictly limited; it is not yet a "Regularly Constituted Lodge;" but an inchoate sort of organization, a fledgling in the nest. Not until the Grand Lodge has authorized the issuance of the Warrant, or Charter, does it begin to assume the status of a "regular" lodge, and not even then, until the new lodge is consecrated, dedicated and constituted by the Grand Master and his officers, or those delegated for the ceremony. The ceremony, by the way, is one which every Master Mason should make an effort to see, if possible. The Charter of the new lodge will name those who are to be its first Worshipful Master, Senior and Junior Wardens, who will hold office until their successors are duly elected and installed.

The Grand Lodge (consisting of the particular lodges represented by their Masters - in most cases also include the Senior and Junior Wardens, Past Masters; and Past Officers and Past Grand Masters of the Grand Lodge), is the governing body in its Jurisdiction. In the United States, Jurisdictional lines are coincident with the state lines; there are currently forty-nine United State Grand Lodges; the forty-ninth being that of the District of Columbia. Each Grand Lodge is supreme unto itself; its word is Masonic law within its own borders.

Grand Lodges adopt for themselves a Constitution and By-Laws for their own government, just as particular lodges adopt by-laws for their government. These documents are the body of law of the Grand Jurisdiction, which, however, rest upon the Old Charges and the ancient Constitutions (which have descended to us from the first Mother Grand Lodge).

The decisions in mooted questions made by Grand Masters, or the Grand Lodge (or both); are usually based on the Ancient Landmarks, Usages and Customs of the Fraternity.-."

In the interim between meetings of a Grand Lodge, the Grand Master is the Grand Lodge. His powers are arbitrary, absolute and almost unlimited; at least in theory. Most Grand Lodges provide that the acts of the Grand Master may be revised, confirmed or rejected by the Grand Lodge in its meetings; which is, of course, a check against any too radical moves. But, as a

matter of fact, a brother rarely becomes a Grand Master without having served a long and arduous apprenticeship. Almost invariably he has been Master of his own lodge, and by years of service and interest in the Grand Lodge has demonstrated his ability and fitness to preside over the grand Lodge. The real check against arbitrary actions of the Grand Master is more in his Masonry than the law, more in his desire to do the right thing than in the legal power compelling him to do so.

Private lodge and Grand Lodge officers arrive at their respective stations either by election or appointment. In some lodges, all officers in the "line" are elective. In other lodges, only the senior officers (Master, Senior and Junior Wardens, Secretary and Treasurer) are elected, all other being appointed by the Master. The same is true of Grand Lodges; for instance, in the District of Columbia all officers are elected. In New Jersey, the Grand Master, Deputy Grand Master, Senior Grand and Junior Grand Wardens, Grand Secretary, Grand Treasurer are elected; all other Line officers are appointed by the Grand Master.

In particular lodges, as a general rule, appointed officers are re-appointed to one station higher each year; the highest appointed officer is then, usually, elected to the lowest elective office. This custom is broken, of course, when incumbents are no longer available, or when the lodge decides, for any reason, not to re-elect an officer. In the normal course of events, in most lodges, both particular and Grand Lodges, election or appointment at the "foot of the line" will eventually lead to the highest office, provided the officer works, is able, willing and demonstrates that he can fill the highest chairs. It is this system which is depended upon to give long experience and years of Masonic knowledge to future Masonic leaders.

The term of office for Masters and Grand Masters is one year; in some Jurisdictions, by custom and not by law, Grand Masters are elected two years in succession and in one he serves three consecutive terms. In some Jurisdictions, also, the "line" is not advanced, but Grand Masters are elected "from the floor." Occasionally the Master of a particular lodge will be elected for a second or third, or even greater number of years, but generally the "line" proceeds to "move up" at the annual elections.

Secretaries and Treasurers generally serve as long as they are willing; a lodge which has a good Secretary and Treasurer almost invariably re-elects the same incumbents year after year, which is also true of Grand Lodges. These officers, then, become the connecting links between different administrations, which makes for stability and smooth running, except in those rare instances in which a Secretary, from long service, comes to believe that "his" lodge and "his" Master should do "his" will, not their own. When the tail thus attempts to wag the dog, the remedy is found in the annual election! In Grand Lodges, decisions are reached in four ways:

"by Viva voce" or rising votes, by a showing of hands, votes by lodges and/or written ballot. The method is usually a matter of constitutional law; ordinary questions are decided by the least cumbersome method; difficult and involved questions by votes of/by lodges; elections and matters of grave import, such as expulsions, are usually by paper (secret) ballot.

The same holds true of the particular lodge; except of course that it cannot "vote by lodges" and that it uses the ball or cube instead of the paper ballot.

In the absence of a Master, the senior Warden presides and has, for the time being, the powers and duties of the Master; in his absence, the same devolves upon the Junior Warden. Should all three be absent the lodge (1) either cannot be opened at all, or (2) can be opened by a Past Master, or (3) only by the Grand Master, or his Deputy acting in his stead. Which of these three depends upon local law in the particular Grand Jurisdiction.

In these few pages, only the broad outlines of the organization of Lodges and Grand Lodges can be given. But enough has been written to indicate that the simple skeleton of the Fraternity has a complicated and involved body of law and procedure, that there is much to know, and much, therefore, which the individual Mason should make it his business to study.

In these words we point out the way, and indicate the extent to which his inquiring mind should reach, and if followed they will have been written to a good purpose.