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A HANDY GUIDE ON THE QUEST FOR MASONIC LIGHT

I. INTRODUCTION

A dilemma that undeniably confronts all newly raised master masons is the admonition, which is contained in the third degree “charge” that says:

“As a master mason, you are authorized to correct the irregularities of your less-informed brethren, to fortify their minds with resolution against the snares of the insidious, and to guard them against every allurements to vicious practices.”

Fine, a caution so eloquently phrased, but how is he expected to do it? More so if he became a master mason via the one-day conferral of the three degrees!!

And so, it may be necessary to briefly look back and assess the situation.

Still smarting from the bruises that he acquired while travelling the rough and rugged road (not on the one-day conferral though) but nonetheless feeling the euphoria of recently being elevated to the elite rank of master masons, and most probably also still tipsy at the recently-concluded fellowship that usually follow every raising ceremony, the newly-raised brother begins to wonder what the “charge” was all about. He has now attained the status of being called a peer to many celebrated and immortal men that have graced the rolls of the Craft, men who are listed as heroes, geniuses, statesmen and others in the many countries or nationalities where he may belong, men who have become presidents, kings, men of sciences and even of the cloth whose stature and fame reverberated within all corridors of fame and power, they who have answered to the call of being labelled as “Freemasons”, the newly-raised gentleman begin to wonder that after the completion of the three degrees, what so far, has he achieved?

II. THE QUEST BEGINS

The question that consequently confronts the newly raised brother therefore, is “how does one proceed to learn the ways of the Fraternity that he has recently joined? Sadly, there is no ready answer but the very nature of the Craft’s basic philosophy in part

provides a ready clue. Let now this writer mention one of the Fraternity's simply worded definitions:

“Freemasonry is a system of morality illustrated in symbols.” Or, “it is a system of morality veiled in allegory.”

But how would a novice in the Craft ever understand that gobbledygook?” since the lodge that he has joined, and even the Grand Lodge that exercises supervision and control over its existence generally do not have guidelines that can help him understand the intricacies of this mystic brotherhood!! But learn he must if he aspires to earn the title of ever being called being called “a fellow of the Craft.”

III. A SUGGESTED GUIDE AS ENVISIONED BY BRO. ALLEN E. ROBERTS OF THE MASONIC BROTHERHOOD OF THE BLUE FORGET ME NOT

Scanning the inexhaustible source materials that the world of the Internet offers, this writer was fortunate enough to stumble upon an essay written about Bro. Allen E. Roberts, long time secretary of the Masonic Brotherhood of the Blue Forget me Not, who eloquently pictured the structure or body of Freemasonry in six broad categories as follows:

Ritual= Skeleton (or framework)

Philosophy= Bloodstream

Symbolism= Heart and brains

Benevolence+= Soul

Jurisprudence= Muscles

History= Flesh (or binder)

IV. HOW THE STRUCTURE IS DESIGNED TO WORK

Having thus enumerated the six categories of Freemasonry, a Freemason, whether newly-raised or an old timer who desires to study in earnest can thus proceed with the awesome goal of learning the tenets of the Craft by using the above-mentioned guide no different from a receptacles or storage area where he can periodically accumulate in the proper whatever knowledge he has learned which, understandably, should start with “RITUALS” as follows:

IV-A RITUALS

It is often said that “rituals” are what differentiates Masonry from all other fraternal organizations and that without it; Masonry will just be like any other. These rituals, the three most basic of which introduce the candidate to the ways of the Craft via its three degrees are understandably the best starting points. For the purpose of this article however, it will be necessary to include the other basic ritual instructions: These are:

1. The entered apprentice degree
2. The fellow craft degree
3. The master mason’s degree
4. The installation ceremonies
5. The Last Rites and the Lodge of Remembrance

There are still other rituals but these will no longer be enumerated for the sake of brevity.

Suffice it to say that the newly-raised master mason must be patiently coached by an elder to commit to memory these rituals if he is to progressively advance his knowledge of the Craft, and here is how the time-tested “from mouth to ear method” of instruction is effectively put in play. He should start delivering the lambskin apron, the working tools; learn the role of the marshal, the stewards and the deacons, patiently and progressively committing to memory all the roles that he has performed. As he gains experience, he should also be ready to deliver the lecture of the three degrees until the time he is deemed ready by the lodge to handle more important roles and is therefore consequently chosen to perform the role of a “light” by being elected to any of the fixed stations of the lodge. And this stored knowledge will come handy in scrutinizing and analyzing the myriad of data that he will later classify and sort in the five other categories mentioned earlier. For example, the novice will be able to clearly sort into their proper categories the following phrases as these are committed to his memory, thus:

*** In it you’ll find the important duties you owe to God, your neighbour or yourself, or

***By refusing to recommend anyone to the participation of our privileges unless you have strong reasons to believe that by similar fidelity, he will ultimately reflect honour into our ancient institution, or

*** White balls elect and black cubes reject, or

*** Justice is that standard or boundary of right that renders unto every man his just due without distinction, And so on and so forth.

IV-B. PHILOSOPHY

A philosophy is usually a simple sentence or a “one liner” that best explains a basic belief. Thus, an oft-repeated philosophy of Freemasonry states that: “It is a brotherhood of men under the fatherhood of God.”

From the above-mentioned phrase, note that three basic ingredients must always be present as follows”, men is in the plural form and that God must be present, the absence of one of which will render the tenet useless.

Citing simple examples, hermits believe in God but do not subscribe to the brotherhood of men and therefore do not qualify; atheists, on the other hand may believe in brotherhood of men but do not think that God exists!

Of course, these philosophies can be rephrased differently but in effect, will produce the same result. Like, “Freemasonry subscribes to the belief in God and in the immortality of the soul”.

In this instance, however, the tenet on brotherhood is implied as it lay hidden in the maxim “love thy neighbour as thyself”, a tenet expounded not only by the Greatest Teacher of all time, but by all known sages of the world. Note also that immortality pertains to the afterlife.

Other tenets, like “brotherly love, relief and truth”, make the sentence more thought-provoking and are therefore appealing but in essence the phrase still conveys the same message.

Curiously also, both the exoteric and esoteric applications of these philosophies are revealed to the discerning adept as follows:

The obvious meaning of “brotherhood of men under the fatherhood of God” pertains to our relationship with our neighbours in this world that *is best measured by the square* while the phrase “the immortality of the soul” pertains to a *deeper meaning that relates more to the world where the compasses are effectively put in use.*

IV-C. SYMBOLISM

Freemasonry, having borrowed its mode of communication from Operative Masonry, uses symbols as its most effective tools of relaying the messages that it seeks to convey. There is no need to itemize these in detail as members are understandably familiar with

these already but for the sake of brevity, the reader is nonetheless advised to refresh himself on the symbolisms of the various tools that were used and were explained in the ritual of the Installation Ceremony. In addition, he is also advised to take interest of the various symbolisms that lay hidden but were nonetheless were impliedly explained in the floor works of the three degrees. In hindsight however, symbols may, to the uninitiated, be tricky. Ever wonder why “hele” means “to conceal” or that a “black ball” actually meant a “black cube?” And has the reader also wondered why the square is the tool used to measure the surface of the earth whereas the compasses are used measures the heavens and those above it?

IV- D. BENEVOLENCE

Charity, the synonym of benevolence is first explained in the lecture of the first degree as the covering of a lodge in the following manner:

“The three principal rounds of which are denominated in faith, hope and charity, which admonishes us to have faith in God, hope for immortality, and charity for all mankind. The greatest of these is charity, for our faith may be lost in sight, hope ends in fruition but charity extends beyond the grave through the boundless realms of eternity.”

And was further amplified the second-degree perambulation. Although quite frankly, it is doubtful whether many of the brethren understood it at all. Charity, after all, is not merely taking a paper bill from one’s own pocket when the Almoner pass around with the Almoner’s bag, nor rummaging the attic for used clothes when calamity occurs, bur it means much more than these. Imagine the ineffectiveness of Freemasonry if charity is deleted from its vocabulary! And how does the reader put the message of charity to practice?

IV- E. JURISPRUDENCE

Jurisprudence appears to be the most complicated topic of the six categories and indeed this may be so. The reader should however take consolation to the fact that like any citizen of whatever nationality ideally should know all the rules and regulations of the country where he pays allegiance to, the same situation applies to Freemasonry. Ideally therefore, it is preferable that he is knowledgeable of all the rules and regulations of the Grand Lodge where his own lodge pays allegiance to although how it can be achieved is like looking for a needle in a haystack. It is still desirable however for the member to familiarize himself with the following:

1. The Constitution and bylaws of Grand Lodge where he belongs,
2. The ancient charges of Masonry

3. The obligation of the three degrees (he has already committed these to memory, anyway),

4. The periodic edicts that govern the Grand Lodge

And so on and so forth.

IV-F HISTORY

All Grand Lodges that exist have their own unique history that deserves to be learned, and it is important to understand these to appreciate his membership better. Most masons are aware how the United Grand Lodge of England was created in the British Isles and therefore no longer needs further elaboration.

Masonry in the Philippines, on the other hand, was introduced by Jose Malcampo y Monje, a Spaniard who later became Governor General of Spain, when he organized the Primera Luz Filipina in 1856 under the banner of Gran Oriente Lusitano of Portugal to escape the clutches of the marauding Hong Kong Masons that were established under the aegis of the British Masons. But let's not talk about it any further as this paper may turn out to be a boring article.

Suffice it to add however that in addition to what may be called "local Masonic history", it is also preferable that he should also have a general idea of the Masonic history of the mother grand lodge from where his own Grand Lodge came from. The Grand Lodge of the Philippines for example was a creation of the Grand Lodge of California, which explains why the rituals and basic rules that govern both jurisdictions are in many respects, similar. How the Filipino Masons became Americanized despite its roots coming from Gran Oriente Lusitano of Portugal and later nurtured by Gran Oriente Espanol is a topic that deserves more than a page in order to be appreciated and therefore will no longer be touched in this paper.

But one may well wonder; did the masons of Cavite that were organized by Malcampo fraternized with the Masons of Manila where Jacobo Zobel, a Filipino of a German father who joined in Manila and in like manner, did they fraternize with the Masons that were organized under the aegis of the Gran Oriente Espanol? The most likely answer of course is "probably not" because they were organized under different grand jurisdictions that coexisted during that time.

V. A SHORT TREATISE ON THE “MYSTIC TIE”.

Non masons are naturally baffled whenever they see Masons who are total strangers to each other conversing or helping each other whom they have met for the first time and probably will never meet again. This happens when, accompanied by a friend who is a Mason, would chance upon a total stranger in a foreign land, especially at airports who, upon recognizing each other as fraternal brothers would offer a helping hand in exchange of a mere “handshake”. The non mason will naturally suspect there is something mysterious but will never be able to know what the mystery is all about. Short anecdotes like these are common and none but the initiates can explain how it can ever come about.

VI. SUMMARY

Readers who have reached this page may complain that many topics still deserve mention; for example, why there are clandestine masons, how the relationship of the individual member to his lodge and to the grand lodge interplay with the Grand Lodges of other grand jurisdiction, or why there is a gap between the Prince Hall Masons and mainstream Freemasonry. In like manner, he may also wonder why Grand Orient of France was declared irregular by the others.