

Introduction To Freemasonry
Entered Apprentice
By Carl H. Claudy

[The Lodge](#)

[Entered Apprentice](#)

["Suitable Proficiency"](#)

[Ritual](#)

["Free Will And Accord"](#)

The Lodge

During the ceremonies of initiation the Entered Apprentice is informed what a lodge is. In other than the words of the ritual a Masonic lodge is a body of Masons warranted or chartered as such by its Grand Lodge and possessing the three Great Lights in Masonry.

The lodge usually [ⁱⁱⁱ] comes into being when a certain number of brethren petition the Grand Master, who, if it is his pleasure issues a dispensation which forms these brethren into a provisional lodge, or a lodge under dispensation, familiarly known as U.D. The powers of the U.D. lodge 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 does it assume the status of a "regular" lodge, and not then until it is consecrated, dedicated, and constituted by the Grand Master and his officers, or those he delegates for the ceremony. The warrant of the new lodge names its first Worshipful Master, Senior Warden, and Junior Warden, who hold office until their successors are duly elected and installed.

Lodge officers are either elected or appointed. In some lodges in some jurisdictions all officers in the "line" are elected. In others only the Master, Senior and Junior Wardens, Secretary and Treasurer are elected, the others being appointed.

The term of office is one year, but nothing prevents re-election of a Master or Wardens. Indeed, Secretaries and Treasurers generally serve as long as they are willing; a lodge almost invariably re-elects the same incumbents year after year to these places. These officers become the connecting links between different administrations, which practice makes for stability and smooth running.

In the absence of the Master the Senior Warden presides and has for the time being the powers and duties of the Master; in his absence the same devolve upon the Junior Warden.

All lodges have an officer stationed "without the door with a drawn sword in his hand." He is the Tyler and his duties are to keep off "cowans and eavesdroppers." In operative days the secrets of the Freemasons were valuable in coin of the realm. The Mason who knew "the Mason Word" could travel in foreign countries and receive a Master's wages. Many who could not or would not conform to the requirements tried to ascertain the secrets in a clandestine manner.

The eavesdropper – literally, one who attempts to listen under the eaves, and so receives the droppings from the roof – was a common thief who tried to learn by stealth what he would not learn by work.

The cowan was an ignorant Mason who laid stones together without mortar or piled rough stone from the field into a wall without working them square and true. He was a Mason without the word, with no reputation; the Apprentice who tried to masquerade as a Master.

The operative Masons guarded their assemblies against the intrusion of both the thief and the half-instructed craftsman. Nothing positive is known of the date when the guardian of

the door first went on duty. He was called a Tiler or Tyler because the man who put on

the roof or tiles (tiler) completed the building and made those within it secure from intrusion; therefore the officer who guarded the door against intrusion was called, by analogy, a Tyler.

Lodges are referred to as Symbolic, Craft, Ancient Craft, Private, Particular, Subordinate, and Blue, all of which names distinguish them from other organizations, both Masonic and non-Masonic. The word "subordinate" is sometimes objected to by Masonic scholars, most of whom prefer other appellations to distinguish the individual Master Mason's lodge from the Grand Lodge. All Masonic lodges of Ancient Craft Masonry are "Blue Lodges" blue being the distinctive Masonic colour, from the blue vault of heaven which is the covering of a symbolic lodge, and which embraces the world, of which the lodge is a symbol.

To such an organization a man petitions for the degrees of Freemasonry. If the lodge accepts his petition a committee is appointed to investigate the petitioner. The committee reports to the lodge whether or not, in its opinion, the petitioner is suitable material out of which to make a Mason.

The statutory time of a month having elapsed and all the members of the lodge having been notified that the petition will come up for ballot at a certain stated communication (Masonic word for "meeting"), the members present ballot on the petition.

The ballot is secret and both the laws and the ancient usages and customs surrounding it are very strict. No brother is permitted to state how he will ballot or how he has balloted. No brother is permitted to inquire of another how he will or has balloted. One black cube (negative ballot) is sufficient to reject the petitioner.

The secrecy of the ballot and the universal (in this country) requirement that a ballot be unanimous to elect are two bulwarks of the Fraternity. Occasionally both the secrecy and the required unanimity may seem to work a hardship, when a man apparently worthy of being taken by the hand as a brother is rejected, but no human institution is perfect, and no human being acts always according to the best that is in him. The occasional failure of the system to work complete justice must be laid to the individuals using it and not to the Fraternity.

More will be said later in these pages on the power of the ballot, its use and abuse; here it is sufficient to note one reason for the secret and unanimous ballot by which the petitioner may be elected to receive initiation. Harmony – oneness of mind, effort, ideas, and ideals – is one of the foundations of Freemasonry. Anything which interferes with harmony hurts the institution. Therefore it is essential that lodges have a harmonious membership; that no man be admitted to the Masonic home of any brother against that brother's will.

Having passed the ballot, the petitioner in due course is notified, presents himself and is initiated.

Entered Apprentice

He then becomes an Entered Apprentice Mason. He is a Mason to the extent that he is called "brother" and has certain rights; he is not yet a Mason in the legal Masonic sense. Seeing a framework erected on a plot of ground we reply to the question, "What are they building?" by saying, "A house." We mean, "They are building something which eventually will be a house." The Entered Apprentice is a Mason only in the sense that he is a rough ashlar [^{iv}] in process of being made into a perfect ashlar.

The Entered Apprentice is the property of the lodge; he can receive his Fellowcraft and Master Mason degrees nowhere else without its permission. But he does not yet pay dues to the lodge, he is not yet permitted to sign its by-laws, he can enter it only when it is open on the first degree, he cannot hold office, vote or ballot, receive Masonic burial, attend a Masonic funeral as a member of the lodge, and has no right to Masonic charity.

He has the right to ask his lodge for his Fellowcraft's degree. He has the right of instruction by competent brethren to obtain that "suitable proficiency" in the work of the first degree which will entitle him to his second degree if the brethren are willing to give it to him.

The lodge asks very little of an Entered Apprentice besides the secrecy to which his obligation bound him and those exhibitions of character outlined in the Charge given at the close of the degree.

It requires that he be diligent in learning and that so far as he is able he will suit his convenience as to time and place to that of his instructors.

Inasmuch as the Rite of Destitution is taught the initiate in the first degree he may naturally wonder why an Entered Apprentice has not the right to lodge charity if he needs it. Individual Masonic charity he may, of course, receive, but the right to the organized relief of the lodge, or a Grand Lodge, belongs only to a Master Mason.

This is Masonic law; Masonic practice, in the spirit of brotherly love, would offer any relief suddenly and imperatively needed by an initiate – for that is Freemasonry.

"Suitable Proficiency"

In the Middle Ages operative apprentices were required to labour seven years before they were thought to know enough to attempt to become Fellows of the Craft. At the end of the seven-year period an apprentice who had earned the approbation of those over him might make his Master's Piece and submit it to the judgment of the Master and Wardens of his lodge.

The Master's Piece was some difficult task of stone cutting or setting. Whether he was admitted as a Fellow or turned back for further instruction depended on its perfection.

The Master's Piece survives in Speculative Masonry only as a small task and the seven years have shrunk to a minimum of one month. Before knocking at the door of the West Gate for his Fellowcraft's Degree an Entered Apprentice must learn "by heart" a part of the ritual and the ceremonies through which he has passed.

Easy for some, difficult for others, this is an essential task. It must be done, and well done. It is no kindness to an Entered Apprentice to permit him to proceed if his Master's Piece is badly made.

As the initiate converses with well-informed brethren, he will learn that there are literally millions of Masons in the world – three millions in the United States. He does not know them; they do not know him. Unless he can prove that he is a Mason, he cannot visit in a lodge where he is not known, neither can he apply for Masonic aid, nor receive Masonic welcome and friendship.

Hence the requirement that the Entered Apprentice learn his work well is in his own interest.

But it is also of interest to all brethren, wheresoever dispersed, that the initiate know his work. They may find it as necessary to prove themselves to him as he may need to prove himself to them. If he does not know his work, he cannot receive a proof any more than he can give it.

It is of interest to the lodge that the initiate know his work well. Well-informed Masons may be very useful in lodge; the sloppy, careless workman can never be depended upon for good work.

Appalled at the apparently great feat of memory asked, some initiates study with an instructor for an hour or two, find it difficult, and lose courage. But what millions of other men have done, any initiate can do. Any man who can learn to know by heart any two words can also learn three; having learned three he may add a fourth, and so on, until he can stand before the lodge and pass a creditable examination, or satisfy a committee that he has learned enough to entitle him to ask for further progress.

The initiate should be not only willing but enthusiastically eager to learn what is required because of its effect upon his future Masonic career. The Entered Apprentice who wins the honour of being passed to the degree of Fellowcraft by having well performed the only task set him goes forward feeling that he is worthy. As Speculative Freemasonry builds only character, a feeling of unworthiness is as much a handicap in lodge life as a piece of faulty stone is in building a wall.

But the most important reason for learning the work thoroughly goes farther. It applies more and more as the Fellowcraft's Degree is reached and passed and is most vital after the initiate has the proud right to say, "I am a Master Mason."

Ritual

One of the great appeals of Freemasonry, both to the profane [v] and to Masons, is its antiquity. The Order can trace an unbroken history of more than two hundred years in its present form (the Mother Grand Lodge was formed in 1717), and has irrefutable documentary evidence of a much longer existence in simpler forms.

Our present rituals – the plural is used advisedly, as no two jurisdictions are exactly at one on what is correct in ritual – are the source books from which we prove just where we came from and, to some extent, just when.

If we alter our ritual, either intentionally or by poor memorization, we gradually lose the many references concealed in the old, old phrases which tell the story of whence we came and when.

Time is relative to the observer; what is very slow to the man may be very rapid to nature. Nature has all the time there is. To drop out a word here, put in a new one there, eliminate this sentence and add that one to our ritual seems to be a minor matter in a man's lifetime. Yet if it is continued long enough – a very few score of years – the old ritual will be entirely altered and become something new.

We have confirmation of this. Certain parts of the ritual are printed. These printed paragraphs are practically the same in most jurisdictions. Occasionally there is a variation, showing where some committee on work has not been afraid to change the work of the fathers. But as a whole the printed portion of our work is substantially what it was when it was first brought to this country more than two hundred years ago.

The secret work is very different in many of our jurisdictions. Some of these differences are accounted for by different original sources, yet even in two jurisdictions which sprang from the same source of Freemasonry, and originally had the same work, we find variations, showing that mouth-to-ear instruction, no matter how secret it may be, is not wholly an accurate way of transmitting words.

If in spite of us alterations creep in by the slow process of time and human fallibility, how much faster will the ritual change if we are careless or indifferent? The farther away we get from our original source, the more meticulously careful must trust-worthy Masons be to pass on the work to posterity exactly as we receive it. The Mason of olden time could go to his source for re-inspiration – we cannot.

Ritual is the thread which binds us to those who immediately preceded us, as their ritual bound them to their fathers, our grandfathers. The ritual we hand down to our sons and their sons' sons will be their bond with us, and through us with the historic dead. To alter that bond intentionally is to wrong those who come after us, even as we have been wronged when those who preceded us were careless or inefficient in their memorization of ritual.

The Entered Apprentice, then, should not be discouraged if the ritual "comes hard." He should fail not in the task nor question that it is worth while, for on what he does and on the way in which he does it depends in some measure the Freemasonry of the future. As he does well or ill, so will those who come after him do ill or well.

"Free Will And Accord"

Though he knows it not the petitioner encounters his first Masonic symbol when he receives from the hands of a friend the petition for which he has asked.

Freemasons do not proselyte. The Order asks no man for his petition. Greater than any man, Freemasonry honours those she permits to knock upon her West Gate. Not king, prince, nor potentate; president, general, nor savant can honour the Fraternity by petitioning a lodge for the degrees.

Churches send out missionaries and consider it a duty to persuade men to their teachings. Commercial organizations, Boards of Trade, Chambers of Commerce, Life Insurance Associations, and so on, attempt to win members by advertising and persuasion. Members are happy to ask their friends to join their clubs. But a man must come to the West Gate of a lodge "of his own free will and accord," and can come only by the good offices of a friend whom he has enlisted on his behalf.

The candidate obligates himself for all time: "Once a Mason, always a Mason." He may take no interest in the Order. He may dimit, [vi] become unaffiliated, [vii] be dropped N.P.D., [viii] be tried for a Masonic offense and suspended or expelled, but he cannot "unmake" himself as a Mason, or ever avoid the moral responsibility of keeping the obligations he voluntarily assumes.

If a man be requested to join or persuaded to sign a petition, he may later be in a position to say, "I became a Mason under a misapprehension. I was over-persuaded. I was argued into membership," and might thus have a self-excusing shadow of a reason for failure to do as most solemnly agrees.

But no man does so join unless he signs a false statement. He must declare in his petition, and many times during his progress through the degrees, that the act is "of my own free will and accord." Not Only must he so declare, but he must so swear.

Freemasonry gives her all – and it is a great gift – to those she accepts. But she gives only to those who honestly desire the gift. He who is not first prepared to be a Freemason in his heart, that is, of his own free will and accord, can never be one.