



FRANK REED HORTON MEMORIAL LODGE NO. 379, F. & A. M.

UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF THE MOST WORSHIPFUL GRAND LODGE OF FREE AND ACCEPTED MASONS OF THE
PHILIPPINES

ecture No. 7 **CANDIDATES' NECESSARY PROFICIENCY AND PROBATION**

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Quoted from Albert Mackey's "Principles of Masonic Law" and "Jurisprudence of Freemasonry"

1. There is, perhaps, no part of the jurisprudence of Masonry which it is more necessary strictly to observe than that which relates to the advancement of Petitioners through the several degrees.
2. The method which is adopted in passing Apprentices and raising Fellow Crafts—the probation which they are required to serve in each degree before advancing to a higher—and the instructions which they receive in their progress, often materially affect the estimation which is entertained of the institution by its initiates.
3. The candidate who long remains at the porch of the temple, and lingers in the middle chamber, noting everything worthy of observation in his passage to the holy of holies, while he better understands the nature of the profession upon which he has entered, will have a more exalted opinion of its beauties and excellencies than he who has advanced, with all the rapidity that dispensations can furnish, from the lowest to the highest grades of the Order.
 - a) In the former case, the design, the symbolism, the history, and the moral and philosophical bearing of each degree will be indelibly impressed upon the mind, and the appositeness of what has gone before to what is to succeed will be readily appreciated.
 - b) But, in the latter, the lessons of one hour will be obliterated by those of the succeeding one;
 - 1) that which has been learned in one degree, will be forgotten in the next; and when all is completed,
 - 2) and the last instructions have been imparted, the dissatisfied neophyte will find his mind, in all that relates to Masonry, in a state of chaotic confusion.

Like Cassio, he will remember "*a mass of things, but nothing distinctly.*"

4. A hundred years ago it was said that "*Masonry was a progressive science, and not to be attained in any degree of perfection, but by time, patience, and a considerable degree of application and industry.*"
 - a) And it is because that due proportion of time, patience and application, has not been observed, that we so often see Masons indifferent to the claims of the institution, and totally unable to discern its true character.
 - b) The arcana of the Craft should be gradually imparted to its members, according to their improvement.
5. There is no regulation of our Order more frequently repeated in our constitutions, nor one which should be more rigidly observed, than that which requires of every candidate a "suitable proficiency" in one degree, before he is permitted to pass to another.
 - a) But this regulation is too often neglected, to the manifest injury of the whole Order, as well as of the particular Lodge which violates it.
 - b) Ignorant and unskillful workmen are introduced into the temple.
 - c) It may be worth the labor we shall spend upon the subject, to investigate some of the authorities which support us in the declaration, that no candidate should be promoted, until, by a due probation, he has made "suitable proficiency in the preceding degree."
6. In one of the earliest series of regulations that have been preserved—made in the reign of Edward III, it was ordained, "*that such as were to be admitted Master Masons, or Masters of work, should be examined whether they be able of cunning to serve their respective Lords, as well the lowest as the highest, to the honor and worship of the aforesaid art, and to the profit of their Lords.*"
 - a) Here, then, we may see the origin of that usage, which is still practiced in every well governed Lodge, not only of demanding a proper degree of proficiency in the candidate, but also of testing that proficiency by an examination.

- b) This cautious and honest fear of the fraternity, lest any Brother should assume the duties of a position which he could not faithfully discharge, and which is, in our time, tantamount to a Petitioner's advancing to a degree for which he is not prepared.
7. This is again exhibited in the charges enacted in the reign of James II.
- a) In these charges it is required,
"that no Mason take on no lord's worke, nor any other man's, unless he know himselfe well able to perform the worke, so that the Craft have no slander."
- b) In the same charges, it is prescribed that
"no master, or fellow, shall take no apprentice for less than seven years."
- c) In another series of charges, whose exact date is not ascertained, but whose language and orthography indicate their antiquity, it is
"Ye shall ordain the wisest to be Master of the work; and neither for love nor lineage, riches nor favor, set one over the work who hath but little knowledge, whereby the Master would be evil served, and ye ashamed."
- d) These charges clearly show the great stress that was placed by our ancient Brethren upon the necessity of skill and proficiency, and they have furnished the precedents upon which are based all the similar regulations that have been subsequently applied to Speculative Masonry.
8. In the year 1722, the Grand Lodge of England ordered the "Old Charges of the Free and Accepted Masons" to be collected from the ancient records, and, having approved of them, they became a part of the Constitutions of Speculative Freemasonry.
- In these Charges, it is ordained that *"a younger Brother shall be instructed in working, to prevent spoiling the materials for want of judgment, and for increasing and continuing of brotherly love."*

9. Subsequently, in 1767, it was declared by the Grand Lodge, that *"no Lodge shall be permitted to make and raise the same Brother, at one and the same meeting, without a dispensation from the Grand Master, or his Deputy;"*

And, lest too frequent advantage should be taken of this power of dispensation, to hurry Petitioners through the degrees, it is added that the dispensation, *"on very particular occasions only, may be requested."*

10. The Grand Lodge of England afterwards found it necessary to be more explicit on this subject, and the regulation of that body is now contained in the following language:

"No candidate shall be permitted to receive more than one degree on the same day, nor shall a higher degree in Masonry be conferred on any Brother at a less interval than four weeks from his receiving a previous degree, nor until he has passed an examination in open Lodge in that degree."

11. This seems to be the recognized principle on which the fraternity are, at this day, acting in this Jurisdiction as those in the United States.
 - a) The rule is, perhaps, sometimes, and in some places, in abeyance.
 - b) A few lodges, from an impolitic desire to increase their numerical strength, or rapidly to advance men of worldly wealth or influence to high stations in the Order, may infringe it, and neglect to demand of their Petitioners that suitable proficiency which ought to be, in Masonry, an essential recommendation to promotion.
 - c) But the great doctrine that each degree should be well studied, and the candidate prove his proficiency in it by an examination, has been uniformly set forth by the Grand Lodge.
 - d) Our Constitution provides in Art. VI, Sec. 28 for this proficiency requirement.

12. This subject is so important, that there should be no hesitation to add to the influence of these opinions the great sanction of Preston's authority.

That able philosopher of Masonry says:

"Many persons, are deluded by the vague supposition that our mysteries are merely nominal; that the practices established among us are frivolous, and that our ceremonies may be adopted, or waived at pleasure. On this false foundation, we find them hurrying through all the degrees of the Order, without adverting to the propriety of one step they pursue, or possessing a single qualification requisite for advancement. Passing through the usual formalities, they consider themselves entitled to rank as masters of the art, solicit and accept offices, and assume the government of the Lodge, equally unacquainted with the rules of the institution they pretend to support, or the nature of the trust they engage to perform. The consequence is obvious; anarchy and confusion ensue, and the substance is lost in the shadow. Hence men eminent for ability, rank, and fortune, are often led to view the honors of Masonry with such indifference, that when their patronage is solicited, they either accept offices with reluctance, or reject them with disdain."

Let, then, no Lodge which values its own usefulness, or the character of our institution, admit any candidate to a higher degree, until he has made suitable proficiency in the preceding one, to be always tested by a strict examination in open Lodge. Nor can it do so, without a palpable violation of the laws of Masonry.