

Masonic Digest

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MASONIC JURISPRUDENCE

It may surprise some to hear that we have enough Masonic law to warrant the term "Jurisprudence," which infers a system or body of law as opposed to an isolated rule. Others will associate the word "law" with our civil law with its prohibitions, penalties and sanctions. Masonry differs from the State in that the prohibitions are a matter of conscience, and the only sanctions are those of public opinion (Masonic Brethren) and the power of reprimand, suspension or expulsion from membership.

In spite of these limitations Masonry has a system and body of law which goes back for many centuries. This system embraces both principles and procedure. The principles are to be found in two sources, viz., in what we know as the Landmarks and in the Ancient Charges. Procedure is dealt with in the Book of Constitutions, and also to some extent in Grand Lodge decisions.

The Landmarks may be defined as ancient doctrines and customs that are essential to Masonry's identity, remove a Landmark and Masonry would be something else. For this reason the Landmarks cannot be changed by any Mason, Lodge or Grand Lodge. Being the fundamentals of Masonry the Landmarks constitute its basic laws. As examples of Landmarks the following may be cited: Belief in Deity, secrecy, qualifications for membership in the Fraternity, modes of recognition.

The Ancient Charges require adherence to the moral law, conformity to the laws of the country whose protection we invoke, thrift and honourable dealing in private life, courtesy, and the promotion of the social virtues, that is, working for the good of the community and of society at large. They also call for loyalty to Masonry as a whole, and to our Lodge and *Grand* Lodge in particular. .

The Master-elect of a Lodge must give his assent to a summary of the Ancient Charges before he can be installed. In addition, he is obliged to admit that it is not in the power of any man, or body of men, to make innovation in the body of Masonry. This is an all-important fact. Masonry has its roots far in the past, it has been proved in the fires of experience, and it survives today. There may be things which some think should be improved. Possibly they are right, but the result of change might be to create something other than Masonry.

The structure of most Grand Lodges is based on the General Regulations adopted by the Grand Lodge of England shortly after it was created in the year 1717. The General Regulations contain these words, "Every Annual Grand Lodge has an inherent Power and Authority to make new Regulations, or to alter them, for the real benefit of this Ancient Fraternity, provided always that the old Landmarks be carefully preserved." The regulations of a Grand Lodge, therefore, are liable to amendment and change, in fact they are amended fairly frequently.

Masonic Jurisprudence also is concerned with the by-laws of a Lodge. Although a Lodge may make its own by-laws, they must be consistent with the regulations of Grand Lodge and be approved by the Grand Master.

Grand Lodge decisions and the edicts of Grand Masters also form part of the legal structure of Masonry. Thus Masonic Jurisprudence includes written laws, decisions, edicts and unwritten laws such as the Landmarks and other established practises of the Fraternity. The system is looser than the similar body of law for the government of a nation. Nevertheless, the Craft is well governed.

ACCORDING TO AN ANCIENT CUSTOM

It was Christmas Eve. The brethren of Fraternity Lodge F. & A. M. filled the lodge room above Joe Moore's hardware store and crowded the hooks in the ante-room with coats and mufflers. The little sheet-iron stove at the left of the Senior Warden's station had been fed since mid-afternoon with pine knots and had striven so gallantly to conquer the chill air that it had not only warmed the room, but had filled it with the scent of blistered varnish as well. Caked snow carried in on the boots of the brethren left little pools of moisture on the carpeted floor, and a ring of overshoes placed about the stove steamed moistly as they dried in the heat. Men rubbed their *hands* and chafed their *ears* as they arrived and their talk was of the falling mercury.

Then there came the warning sound of the gavel and the

Brothers of Fraternity Lodge took their stations and filled the chairs which lined the walls. For them the storm outside did not exist. It was completely forgotten in the opening of that most beautiful of all degrees, lost to remembrance in the warmth of that indefinable spirit, that certain but elusive thing which men have striven in vain to name, and which, in acknowledgment of the futility of the quest, they have called "The Mystic Tie." Little wonder, then, that only a few saw Ezra Holcomb slip quietly through the inner door and tiptoe hurriedly down the room. They saw Everett Sykes, the Worshipful Master, incline his head to catch a hurriedly whispered message, saw him stretch out his hand for his gavel and heard with amazement the single blow which interrupted the work.

"Conduct the candidate to the robing room."

"Lights!" ordered Everett Sykes sharply, and as the illumination leaped forth he *came* quickly to his feet. "The Orphanage is burning. Twenty children are in danger. There are enough cars outside to carry every man. Get your hats and coats. Jim Purdie! Get a Nre started in our kitchen range and bring *over* all the milk you have in your lunchroom. Tyler! Where's the Tyler? Keep a fire going in this *room*. We'll need it. All right, Brothers, hurry!"

Of that ride through the night the village of Friendship will tell you many tales. Most of them have to do with the reckless driving of Joseph Moore who, urged to greater and greater efforts by Everett Sykes, passed every car on the narrow road by the simple expedient of going into the ditch and out again. Close behind him came Ezra Holcomb, the fire chief, the gong of his red tire truck clanging like mad. The chief rode alone, for the reason that, having stopped to give the alarm to Fraternity Lodge, he had forgotten to sound it at the fire station.

An exhausted and almost hysterical matron tumbled through the snow towards Everett Sykes as he alighted from the car and an instant later the children, catching sight of one they knew as a friend, came racing towards him, their whimpering cries raised to glad shouts of recognition.

"All here?" demanded Everett Sykes.

"Every single one," wept the matron, finding relief in tears. "We got them all out, but they're half frozen and there isn't a place to take them. Half of them have no coats or hats because we had to hurry them so."

It was not long before the cars had returned to the village of Friendship with their precious cargoes, Up in the old dining-

room Joseph Purdie and the Tyler had worked a miracle. Near the stove they had grouped short tables and on them they had spread the lodge linen. Before every chair was a bowl, a glass of milk and small but gaily colored Christmas toys, while from the open door of the kitchen there came the unmistakable odor of steaming soup. Meanwhile the women of the village had turned out to lend a hand. The capable Mrs. Samuel Trix scuffled her way through the room in a pair of her husbands overshoes, clutching her coat around her throat with one hand, lest the result of her hurried dressing be revealed. with her voice and one free hand she showered orders like a pinwheel.

Men argued for the right to take a child upon their knees at the tables, only to be compelled to relinquish the opportunity to their wives. What could mere men and fathers do but retreat before the natural prerogatives of motherhood? And what more natural than that they should retreat to a place where there was something to eat? Gathered in the kitchen, the Brothers of Fraternity Lodge helped themselves to cups of hot coffee, and between sips discussed means of caring for the children until representatives of the Children's Aid Society should appear.

"Where's Everett Sykes?" asked Henry Helfin finally.

"Gone into the lodge-room," replied Jim Bulger. "Took a lot of the women an' young ones with him."

Joseph Moore looked into the dining-room. "Gosh, let's get out of here," he said. "Everybody's gain' in."

It was a strange sight that the crayon enlargements of departed Past Masters looked down from the walls of Fraternity **Lodge** that night. On either side of Everett Sykes, in the East, was a chubby boy of five, eyeing the room with wide and solemn eyes. At the secretary's desk sat Joseph Moore, engaged in entertaining a white-haired little miss by spinning silver coins. Henry Helfin had lingered in the kitchen too long to take his usual seat in the West. His chair was occupied by the ample form of Mrs. Trix, and Mrs. Trix was giving no consideration whatever to the duties of the station. Instead, she was repeating the words of a ritual of her own, a ritual quite as ancient among women as the ceremonies of the oldest of all fraternities is among men-the softly sung words of a baby's lullaby.

When the room was filled, Everett Sykes arose and rapped for attention. "Brothers," he said, and then, catching the eye of the occupant of the Senior Warden's chair, he added hastily - "*and* sisters. The hour is late and there is no need for a discussion of the events which led up to the situation that prevails

in this lodge-room tonight. I feel that it is scarcely necessary for me to make an appeal to you to care for these children tonight. I know you will not fail in this. I ask for an expression of opinion."

From the Senior Warden's chair the emphatic Mrs. Trix broke the silence. "I'd like," she said, "to see any one take this child away from Samuel and myself until after Christmas."

"Here, too!" declared Henry Helfin. "The wife and I haven't had a real children's Christmas in our house for twenty years."

From all over the room came eager voices, claiming the privilege of a child, and as hurried family councils developed and hasty plans were made, it was evident that the appeal of Everett Sykes had fallen on willing hearts. Then the village marshal arose and the Worshipful Master held up a hand for silence.

"What is it, Jim?"

"Well," said the marshal, clearing his throat, before it's too late, I kind of think the Brothers of Fraternity Lodge ought to have a session here alone an' consider what the Grand Lodge is apt to do about our breakin' up a lodge meeting' this way an' havin' the hull town in before we get the work done. It kind of bothers me, too, about what the Ancient Landmarks say about it."

"I wouldn't let it bother me tonight," said Everett Sykes with a smile, "because I don't believe the Ancient Landmarks touch on the subject."

"But the Grand Lodge!" objected the marshal. "What you gain' to say when they ask you where you got your authority?"

"My authority is there," he answered. "Wi11 you step to the altar, Brother Jim?" Now turn to St. Luke and find the second chapter."

Adjusting his glasses, the marshal reverently opened the Book and found the place.

"There is something in the eighth verse," said Everett Sykes, "which concerns an ancient custom. Will you read it aloud?"

And slowly tracing the words with his finger, Jim Bulger read: "There were shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night."

Condensed story from "The Lodge in Friendship Village"

By P. W. George.



FOUNDATIONS OF LIFE

"Let there be light" is a quotation associated with one of the great moments in the life of every Mason. A similar association of light and life is suggested in the closing passages of the Biblical

account of the Creation. "And to every beast of the earth and to every fowl of the air, and to everything that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat." Here simply stated is a biological fact of great importance. For in other words, it says that the green plants manufacture food for every living thing.

The fundamental food factory of the world is the chloroplast, a very small particle of matter located in the leaves of the green plants. The chloroplast a power plant, called chlorophyl, which taps the energy of sunlight. The raw materials, entering the tiny factory are water, taken from the soil, and carbon dioxide gas, drawn in from the air. The product out-turned is sugar. Thus, solar energy is employed to make from materials low in potential energy, a product possessing greater energy. Moreover, this invisible process, called photosynthesis, is the only feasible method known whereby the energy of sunlight can be captured and stored.

Sugar made in the chloroplasts and water and minerals derived from the soil are the materials from which green plants fashion a variety of products. Employed in the work are groups of chemists, called enzymes, each a specialist. An enzyme is a chemical. Yet it possesses the uncanny property of bringing about difficult chemical reactions with ease and efficiency without itself being changed. By it atoms and groups of atoms are joined to construct molecular edifices of great complexity. By its skillful synthesis, starch, fats and oils are made, cellulose or wood is manufactured, proteins and vitamins are fashioned. Even the color of flowers, their alluring perfume and sweet nectars are subtle products of this chemical synthesis. In this way the green plants manufacture their requirements and provide food for every living thing.

When food is eaten its complex molecules are broken up into simpler compounds by enzymes cunningly located throughout the body. Energy is thereby liberated to operate the body mechanism, and spare parts are provided for maintenance and repair. Thus, the stored energy of sunlight is utilized, and ultimately the water, carbon dioxide gas and minerals are returned to the environment from whence they came.

This sketch from bio-chemistry may serve to enlarge our vision of the works of the Great Architect who has entrusted human life to so humble a creation as the green plant. It may serve also to remind us that as sunlight is the foundation of physical life so the Light of Freemasonry is the foundation of a spiritual life, for this Light is Truth.