

# LODGE PRACTICES & PROCEDURES

by Roger M. Firestone

THE GRAND MASTER OF MASONS came to our Lodge the other night. You could tell from his bemused expression that it was a strange experience for him. Nobody addressed him as "Most Worshipful." He didn't wear an elaborate gold-trimmed apron, a chain of office, or a jewel with a glittering diamond. There was no committee of distinguished Past Masters and Past District Deputy Grand Masters to present him in a dramatic, candle-lit ceremony held in an otherwise darkened lodge room. His wife wasn't introduced, or even invited, nor was there a ladies' program during the lodge meeting; the wives stayed home. The Master of the lodge wasn't even there to greet him beforehand, nor was the Senior Warden; the Junior Warden was in charge that night. There was no elaborate banquet, complete with toasts and speeches; the Stewards had some ice cream and cookies after the communication, and one Brother had made a pot of coffee for those who came early.

What kind of sorry excuse for a Lodge is this? How could a Master plan so poorly or be so ignorant of the proper protocols for receiving such an important guest! The brothers of that Lodge surely must be embarrassed to have acquitted themselves in such shabby fashion. *Nothing like that, I tell you!* Every detail of the evening was in accord with established customs and practices. Not a letter or word of ritual was out of place, and all went according to the plan of the Worshipful Master, no matter how incredible that sounds.

You see, this was not the sitting Grand Master, nor a Past Grand Master, nor a Grand Officer acting as Grand Master. No, this man would be the Grand Master of Masons some twenty-three years from now, and he was receiving his First Degree at our lodge. None of us knew, as we prepared him for his first experience in Freemasonry, that he would be Grand Master in somewhat more than two decades. Surely, he didn't know himself--in fact, he probably didn't know that there was such a thing as a Grand Master.

His father was a Mason (how often we hear that!), but never spoke to his son much about Masonry (that too!), leaving him uninformed of what Dad did those three or four nights of the month when the family ate dinner without him. His grandfathers, too, were Masons, but they passed to the Celestial Lodge before he could learn much from them about the Craft. So his initiation was an entirely strange experience, unlike anything he had encountered before.

A strange experience, but not an unpleasant one, because the members of the lodge went out of their way to make the new brother's first night as a Mason a welcoming event. No one left him alone in the fellowship hall before or after the degree. No one made him feel that the ritual was simply a long, boring ceremony to be endured. Rather, he was made to feel the center of the experience and that a score of men had taken, had gone out of their way to be there for him. The members of the Lodge gave him the impression that they were truly glad to have him become a Mason and that they expected him to be just as pleased to join them in the greatest organization in their corner of the world.

When a candidate presents himself for his Entered Apprentice degree--or a sojourning Mason from some other jurisdiction shows up at a stated communication--how do you treat him? Is he really a friend you haven't met before, or are those merely words on a slightly crumpled placard tacked on the Lodge bulletin board? Every one of those famous Masons on the lists we see everywhere was once a "nobody" being prepared by a Steward to knock at the door of a lodge.

Therefore: Resolve to treat every new Mason and every new visitor as if he might be a future lodge Secretary, if not Grand Master! Who knows but that this might be a prophecy that fulfills itself! Our actions, both for good and for ill, have consequences that we seldom foresee.