

**The  
Entered  
Apprentice  
Degree**



*Prepared by the Grand Lodge of Florida through the Committee on Masonic Education  
for the use of the Subordinate Lodges and their members per Regulation 37.18*

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# THE ENTERED APPRENTICE DEGREE

## FOREWORD

*You, as an Entered Apprentice Mason, are a newcomer in a strange land. By the time you are Passed to the Fellow Craft Degree, or Raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason, you will already have gained some experience of Masonry, however slight, and will have come to feel at ease in your new home. As you stand ready to pass through the Inner Door into the Entered Apprentice Degree, however, you are a man with no memories to draw from, no precedents to guide yourself, nothing to go on, but all is new, and strange, and it may even be somewhat disconcerting or even alarming. Nor are you in much better state after the Degree has ended. You doubtless will feel bewildered and wonder what all this was about and what will come next.*

*The purpose of this booklet is to discuss with you this, your First Step, in order that you may become more easily acquainted with it and all that it signifies.*

*But these pages also have a secondary purpose. As is made clear in the booklet itself, the First Degree is not for Apprentices only, but for all Masons. It is not left behind, like a way-station, by those who travel farther, but always continues to be an integral and necessary part of Ancient Craft Masonry as a whole, as binding on a Master Mason in its obligations and authoritative teachings, as on an Apprentice. It is hoped that for this reason Master Masons will find this booklet useful, especially those who, as frequently happens, find themselves with the desire to review once again their First Step into the abundant life of the Craft.*

“Entered Apprentice Degree” is the name of the first step a man takes in becoming a Mason. The general nature of this step is well described by the word “Apprentice,” which, throughout the many languages that use it, always means “a learner, a beginner, or one who has passed through the first stage of birth into a new world.” An Apprentice is a beginner in Masonry; he is a learner of the lore and teachings of that which Masons describe as “the Royal Art.” For Masonry is an art, one of the finest there is; and he is one in the process of being born into the world of Masonry, so different from the profane (or uninitiated) world, a world by itself, with its own nature and laws, its own culture and fellowship, its own purposes and ideals.

This fact that Masonry is a world by itself, with a life of its own, is clearly suggested by the nomenclature of the Craft. In a broad and general fashion all Three Degrees together are described as “initiation,” but in a stricter sense it is the Apprentice who is “initiated,” a Candidate is *Initiated* an Entered Apprentice, *Passed* a Fellow Craft, *Raised* a Master Mason.

This usage is literally correct, for “initiation” means in its true and original sense “a birth,” it applies peculiarly to the beginner of the First Degree because he is one who is just born, or is about to be born, into the Masonic life.

Nor is the word “life” itself a misnomer. To a casual observer Freemasonry might appear to be a kind of artificial thing, like the wearing of a fancy dress at some costume ball, something with no roots deep in experience, a luxury rather than a necessity.

The same kind of observer might also consider the rights of initiation to be a series of formalities or colorful ceremonies not to be taken seriously. An experienced Freemason, however, knows differently; he knows that Masonry is a way of life; a mode of living, which moves in him and helps to shape his life all of the time, whether inside Lodge or out.

Since an Apprentice is beginning a new life rather than a formality, it follows that if he is sincere in his undertaking he will make an earnest effort to understand the Entered Apprentice Degree. That Degree, as will be shown later, is not to be taken as a mere bridge to be crossed and then forgotten; it is the first appearance of Masonry in the Candidate's experience. Masonry does not lie waiting at the end of the Third Degree; it is present in the First. And though it does not reveal itself there in full, yet it is there—as much so as it ever will be elsewhere. If an Apprentice does not embrace it there in an earnest desire to win for himself all that it has to give him, it is difficult to know where else he may then be expected to do so.

From the official and institutional point of view the status of an Entered Apprentice is a modest one. He cannot be a full member of a Lodge, with a voice or vote in it; he may sit in a Lodge only when it is opened in the First Degree; he is not entitled to hold office; he may not join in public processions. He is a man on probation, and what he shall be hereafter will be determined by what account he gives of himself during this period of trial. It is his duty to be obedient to his superiors, to trust his leaders, to follow his guide and fear no danger.

But while all this is true, there is a larger sense in which the First Degree stands on a level of equal dignity with any other honor or Degree. In a Lodge of Ancient Craft Masonry the First Degree serves at least five important purposes: It is a first step in initiation; as such it is over and done with when its last word is spoken, and if a Candidate has been regularly made in a regular Lodge he will never be required to go through it again. It defines and creates a status, a grade, a rank, of which a brief description was given in the paragraph just above; here again, and in this particular sense, it is over and done with when it is over. It contains the obligation of Entered Apprentice, wherein he binds himself to do and not to do certain things, upon his honor as a man. And in certain respects this obligation forms the basis of the disciplinary law to which every Apprentice is held; in other respects it contains duties that will be binding on him throughout his whole Masonic career. Again, the Degree puts the Apprentice in possession of certain modes of recognition; these he will always need, because even after he has become a Master Mason he will have occasion to exchange them with Entered Apprentices. Lastly, the Degree contains a set of teachings which remain permanent throughout all of Masonry, binding on Masons of whatever Degree.

If the reader examines carefully the last three of the five purposes named he will discover at once in what sense it may be said that the First Degree remains in force permanently and is not something finished and left behind when a Candidate has passed to the Degree of Fellow Craft. There are certain elements in the obligation of the First Degree as binding on Master Masons as on Apprentices; Master Masons will need to use the modes of recognition that it furnishes, and the teachings are not for the Apprentice only, but for the whole Craft and are to be accepted and

practiced as much by the Brother who has been fifty years a Mason as by him who has been five minutes an Apprentice.

At this juncture the Apprentice himself may feel like entering a protest. This Degree, he will say, is my introduction to Masonry—scarcely an introduction, but more like a bowing acquaintance; I have never encountered anything like it before; I find it a strange and mystifying thing; I am stranger in a strange land. How, then, am I to go about understanding Masonry at this stage? Will it not be better for me to wait until I have seen more of it?

This difficulty is itself one of the secrets of Masonry's appeal. The Ritual is “work;” the Lodge is a “quarry,” a scene of labor; the member is a “Craftsman,” a workman. The Craft does not wear its heart on its sleeve, nor write out its lesson in great letters on a billboard but maintains a high threshold and expects its Apprentices to use the Working Tools with which they have been supplied. To understand it calls for work, but to do this work is itself one of the principal purposes of a Mason's life; to this he has been called, and he finds in the doing of it his exceeding great reward. If Masonry treated its Candidates as so many children, if it expressed itself to them in primer form, it would soon pall, and the lesson so easily learned would be quickly forgotten or ignored. The difficulty of the task of gaining possession of it is just one of the ways by which a Mason develops and grows, thinks for himself, uses his own faculties, expands his own powers, and becomes in the end, in his own right, a Master.

What the Craft has to give the Apprentice is stored up in symbols, emblems, and allegories, like ore hidden away in the rock. This has from the beginning been its mode of teaching, and it is this that has perpetuated it through the centuries and given it a universal appeal. Suppose that in the beginning it had written down its teaching in a creed of so many words! In a little while language would have changed; the language of the creed would have become a dead language; it would have been the language of one people, not of all! Many would have assented to it perfunctorily, given it only lip-service, and in the course of time the very form in which it had been cast would have become obsolete, a thing only scholars could understand. The Craft would have perished, or would have fallen into the possession of a sect or coterie. Symbolism is a language that does not thus die. It is a universal language understood by people everywhere. It is always alive because it challenges the living energies of men. It cannot become petrified into dogmatism or become a tyrannical harness upon the mind but sets the mind free through making it necessary for each man to think for himself.

The symbolism found throughout the Three Degrees is of different kinds, but in the First Degree it is for the most part of an architectural type, inherited largely from those forefathers of Freemasonry who devoted themselves to the building art in Europe and Britain five, six, and seven centuries ago. Their art was more than a trade, a means of daily livelihood—it was their life. It absorbed their whole attention, so that they gave much attention to morality, religion, and sociability; but many of their symbols were fashioned out of their practice, the materials they worked in, the tools they used, the parts and processes of a building. For this reason one of the clues to the meaning of the Entered Apprentice Degree is found in its history.

The Craft in the first period of its existence is called “Operative Masonry” because all its members were practicing, or operative, workmen, builders in a literal sense. Speculative Masonry, which is building in a symbolical or spiritual sense, developed out of Operative, gradually and over a period

of many years. Nowadays the conditions of labor are, for the most part, regulated by municipal, state, or national law; in the Middle Ages, when the Operative Masons worked, this was not possible, because government had not been developed to a stage where such a thing was practicable. All the workmen in a given craft (or trade) had an organization of their own, and regulated their own affairs—wages, hours of labor, methods, materials, marketing, prices; they even had their own laws, courts, and methods of punishment. Such an organization was called a guild.

In the guild of builders (or Masons) were workmen of every type required by the needs of the art, such as carpenters, glaziers, wallers, pavers, painters, carvers, as well as Masons properly so called. While these Masons belonged to the guild in the same sense as all the others, at the same time they had an organization of their own, and into this they initiated their own men by ceremonies which they had inherited from the distant past. These Masons were organized into Lodges, or guilds.

Because of the requirements of their society, as well as of their work, they were exceedingly careful in their choice of new members. A new member was a lad in the teachable period, usually from twelve to fifteen years of age. It was necessary that he be known to some member, or members, of the Lodge, and that they should sponsor or recommend him, making themselves responsible for his fitness.

The Masons pressed nobody into their membership against his will. To do such would make a serf or bondsman of him, and they admitted no such man; the candidate had to come of his own free will. Since he would be required to do heavy and often dangerous work, it was required that he be sound in body and limb, lest he not have the required stamina or would become through illness or accident a charge upon the brotherhood. He had to be a lad of sound character, in good repute, and able to keep a secret—at the time many of the methods used in building were trade secrets. The discipline of the Craft, moral and physical, was a severe one; without a sound character a man would fail it.

If found thus recommended and qualified the lad (or petitioner) was brought into Lodge, there to be examined in the sight of all, the Brethren deciding by balloting whether to admit him or not. If the ballot was favorable he was thereby elected an Apprentice. He was then bound over, or indentured, to some Master Mason, called an “intender.” For a period of years, usually seven, the Apprentice was to live with his master, be a servant to him, obey him, and respect him, and was to receive no wages, but “findings” only, food, clothing, etc. This Master Mason on his part was obligated to train the Apprentice carefully, teach him how to use his tools and everything else about the trade and to see that he developed properly in his moral and religious character.

After a preliminary probationary period the Apprentice was then called back into Lodge. If upon the intender's report he was shown to be desirable material his selection as an Apprentice was then officially confirmed; his name was entered in the Lodge's book, after which he was called an Entered Apprentice. At the same time he was given a “charge,” or set of instructions, as to how he was to work and comport himself. He was told something of the traditional history of the Craft; he was given an obligation and in all probability received a ceremonial initiation into the secret ritual possessed by the Masons. His status was fixed and defined by Craft law, so that he had certain rights, duties, and privileges, and he was given certain signs and other modes of recognition by which to make himself known to other Entered Apprentices.

For seven years or so he worked under such conditions, a learner of Masonry. At the end of the period he was again called into Lodge; his record was reported, and as a test, or examination, he was compelled to do a difficult piece of work in the sight of all, called his "Master's Piece." If he proved himself to the Lodge's satisfaction he was made a Fellow of the Craft.

Such was an Operative Entered Apprentice. The conditions, rites, obligations, charges and whatever else belonged to his Entering comprised what we should now call his Degree. As Masonry continued from century to century this Degree became necessarily modified to meet changed conditions and new needs, but in substance it always remained the same; and when in the beginning of the eighteenth century in England the Operative Craft became transformed into a Speculative Fraternity, Degree work was retained, albeit for the new purposes of Speculative Masonry, undergoing only such changes as the needs of the Speculative Masonry required. As such we have it to this day.

In the light of the history, here so briefly sketched, it will prove possible to gain some understanding of the symbols of the Degree, not all of them, for there are too many, but a number of representative specimens sufficient to give an Apprentice a clue to the interpretation of all others.

The Lodge itself is a symbol, a symbol of the universe, its floor being the earth, its covering the sky, its walls the cardinal directions of space, and its members representing all mankind. Masonic teachings are universal. They are as broad as the nature of man, as complex as his needs; a man is not a Mason merely while sitting in Lodge but everywhere and always, and his Masonry is a way of life, to be followed in all his affairs. As a Symbol, the Lodge means that which we stated in the beginning: Masonry is a world in itself. To enter the Lodge represents the being born into that world.

The Hoodwink represents the fact that the profane (or outsider) can have no understanding of Masonry because it is something that can be understood only by first-hand experience, not by hearsay or by looking on it at a distance. A candidate, when first he makes entrance, is in that sense a profane; it is only by the actual practice of Masonry that he will become illuminated. But this Masonic truth is itself only an instance of a larger truth. If a man is in doubt about the value or meaning of life, is it his fault, or life's? We all know it is his. Life itself practices no deception nor arbitrarily buries itself in darkness; if a man cannot understand it is because his eyes are closed by his own ignorance, indolence, lusts or passion. He wears a Hoodwink; education, and all the other means and methods of enlightenment exist to help him remove it.

When the Candidate enters the Lodge he is not yet his own Master because he cannot find his own way and must follow his guide with perfect obedience. The Cable Tow is a mark of this fact. But it is also, like the Hoodwink, a symbol of a wider truth—the truth, namely, that every man must remain under the control of others until he is able to control himself. Could all of us achieve self-mastery there would be little need of courts, laws, and policemen to control our actions; each of us would have the law within himself, self-operating; but too often we are led toward disorder by our own blind willfulness and pay the penalty by the humiliation of having others control for us the nature we ought to control for ourselves. So long as we are in that state we wear a Cable Tow; the moment we escape it into the power and freedom of self-direction we become masters and need not be led about by others. Our Cable Tow is removed.

When a candidate arrives at the door of the Lodge he is not permitted to walk casually in; entrance is a ceremony. This ceremony is a symbol of the fact that one can make entrance into any of the great realms of human life only in a certain way, under certain conditions, according to certain laws. The whole of apprenticeship is itself a doctrine concerning this truth; it teaches that to arrive at the high places of achievement a man must be qualified and must undergo a long preparation. Nothing that Masonry teaches is more needed by the world just now, when so many young men, out of a nervous impatience, rush into trades, professions, and callings without the necessary training; worse still, such young men appear to believe that life itself needs no preparation and that the work of the mind, of morality, and of religion is something everybody understands instinctively from babyhood on. Such men rush into Masonry in the same way. The thought of undergoing a long ordeal of training, such as that which the Operative Apprentice was made to endure, would appall them. Perhaps if the Craft revived something of the Operative practice, at least in principle, and demanded that every Candidate be thoroughly trained in Masonry, it would be better. It might be that fewer members would enter, but it is certain there would be less dead wood lying about the precincts of the Temple.

“Circumambulation” means to “walk around,” and refers to an ancient ceremony in which men walked about an Altar, following the same direction as the sun. Every reader will instantly recognize the Masonic ceremony to which it applies. Men in ancient times had the belief that by imitating the sun, or some other natural thing or process, they would gain some degree of control over it to their own advantage. There was a kernel of truth in this belief, and it is that kernel which has been preserved in our own ceremony. In our modern way of speech we call it “cooperation.” Not by working against nature but by cooperating with her do we win her fruits; not in striving against our fellows, or through being at cross-purposes with them, do we make achievements, but rather by working with them. We keep step with them; go in the same direction; their course is our course; all work in common is a kind of Circumambulation.

The East represents Masonic light; therefore the Apprentice is taught to approach it, just as the Operative Apprentice was taught to travel a long path in order to find light on the art he aspired to learn. What is this light? It is of course insight, knowledge, skill, learning, wisdom, information, whatever enables us to learn the nature of the things and forces with which we have to deal during every day of our existence. Our life consists of things, forces, and activities in a bewildering variety. Unless we find a way to understand them we shall never be able to live happily. Such an understanding is one of the most urgent of all necessities, hence it is set at the very forefront of the teaching of the Craft whose motto is “Let there be light.”

The Obligation of the First Degree is at one and the same time a form of law, in a strict institutional sense, and a symbol of what the idea of obligation means in the world at large. The word “obligation” reveals its own meaning; literally it is “to tie, or bind, something to something else.” The word “ligament” comes from the same root. A man may find himself under obligation in many ways: by being in a position, as when he is the father of a family; by making a promise; by owing something; by pledging himself; by a contract. Also an obligation sometimes is presupposed by the rights he may claim, by privileges he enjoys, or by the creed he professes. Sometimes he is held to an obligation by compulsion, as in a contract enforceable by law; at other times his word or his character is his security. To be under obligation, therefore, is to “owe” something, whether in goods, in services, or in being something, and the word “owe” is preserved in the word “ought” which in principle covers all that is meant by obligation. The ideal in Masonry is that when a man becomes a

Master Mason (i.e. in complete possession and control of himself) he can always be depended upon to do what he ought to do, to be what he ought to be.

In its Ritual, Masonry does not gloss over the difficulties a man will encounter as he goes along, nor does it blindly ignore the possibility of failure or tragedy in human life. Far from it! For the Ritual itself is, in the old sense of the word, an “ordeal.” Nevertheless, it never permits us to forget that however hard or difficult to find the path it may be, always there is light to guide us if only we will seek it. This is expressed in the symbolism of the Great Lights, one of the oldest in all of Masonry. The Holy Bible reminds us that there is a light which comes from God, and that the inner nature of things is not alien to our nature but in harmony with it, so that in seeking our best selves we are seeking our real selves. The Square is an ancient symbol born at a time when men believed the earth to be square in shape. It was used as an emblem of the earth and all that belongs to it: the physical, the natural, body, appetites, desires, passions. The Compasses, originally belonging to the same order of thought, by contrast served as an emblem of the heavens; that is, things moral, intellectual, and spiritual. Under the leadership of God, to bring the physical in our nature under the dominion of the spiritual is a principle, which if a man finds it, will evermore be a great light shining across his days.

The Lesser Lights express a similar truth under a different form, albeit a form as ancient. The Sun was deemed the masculine principle, aggressiveness, pugnacity, masculinity; the Moon was the feminine, the passive, the yielding, the soft. It is when the two are held in equipoise, one balancing the other, that Mastership results, typified in this symbol by the Master of the Lodge.

About the Apron many things may be said. It is the Badge of a Mason, a sign of a man's being such, and as worn by the Apprentice is a mark of his status. It is, because of its color, an emblem of innocence. It is a mark of distinction, more honorable than others because it represents honorable toil and constructive work. The world is not completed yet, but is being built. It owes infinitely more to those who create, who, even to a small degree, help to raise its pillars and to round its arches, than to those who have the lust to spoil, or the passion to destroy. Not only, therefore, is a Mason himself a builder; he is one who believes in the honor of up-building as one of the truest of all ideals, and by wearing his Apron he testifies to that faith.

The rite of destitution, whereby a Candidate confesses himself poor and helpless as well as blind, is another symbol nobody knows how ancient. Many Masons of olden times were wont to divide initiation into Masonry into two parts. First, there is a renunciation; the old life is put off, everything antipathetic to the new life is left behind; honors, badges, and distinctions are discarded; they summed this up in the word “off.” Second, there was the preparation: this meant putting on the new, taking up the life of Masonry, the working for a different kind of honor and another kind of reward. They summed this up in the word “on.” The two words are reminiscences of St. Paul's adjuration to his hearers to put “off” the old man and to put “on” the new. The rite of destitution covers all that is meant by the “putting off” of the old.

According to the old customs practiced by the Operative Masons the cornerstone of a building was laid in the Northeast Corner, if not actually, then ideally. Northeast stands midway between the North, region of darkness (for the sun never enters it) and the East, region of light; an Apprentice is said to stand there because he is at the dividing line of the two, having left the darkness of the uninitiated behind him but not yet entered into the light of the new life; there is where he stands and

it is there that he must begin his building. Furthermore, the Apprentice as he stands in the Northeast Corner is himself a symbol, for while thus standing he means that Apprentices themselves are the foundation of the future Craft, just as the trained youth is elsewhere the foundation of the world as it will be in the coming generation.

In the early days of his probation the Operative Mason was taught to use the simplest tools and to do the most elementary kind of work—such work, for example, as giving to a mass of stone freshly hewn from the quarry a first rough approximation to its proper size and shape. To give it size meant measurement; to give it shape meant to knock away its knobs and irregularities. The twenty-four inch gauge, or some similar tool, was used for the first; the gavel was used for the second. These two very fitly were made to stand for all the tools in an Apprentice's kit. This work as done by the Operative Apprentice was transformed by Speculative Masonry into a symbol of an analogous work necessary to be done by the Speculative Apprentice. A man coming into the Craft may possess habits, traits, or other characteristics that would interfere with his work as a Mason, some habit of speech, some trait of manner, some vice; it is required of him that he remove these and that he bring his character into conformity with the requirements of the Craft—a thing that is the same in principle as the changes necessary to fit a man for any other relationship of life that he may wish to enter, such as marriage, a profession, a career, a friendship, an art. All the methods by which such a reorganization of character may be effected are symbolized by the Working Tools.

In reflecting upon these and the other related symbols of the First Degree it is necessary to remember that Apprenticeship itself is, in Freemasonry, a symbol—one of the noblest we have. It represents the whole idea of education, of preparation, of training. Because the more striking and familiar instances of such training necessarily fall within the period of youth it is easy for us to drop into the habit of looking down from the high platform of our adulthood with a certain kindly tolerance upon the spectacle of studious youth, meanwhile thankful that for us our school days are over.

Nothing could possibly more widely miss the truth than such an attitude! Learning as such does not belong peculiarly and essentially to youth; its importance to the young is a mere incident; it belongs to life itself and as such, without regard to age. To live one's mature years possessed of a prejudice against learning is to seriously handicap one's self in the business of living. The learner must be humble, but to be humble is not a humiliation; he must be obedient, but to obey is as dignified as to command, except to foolish men. The needs and opportunities to serve one kind of an apprenticeship or another fall as frequently in maturity as in adolescence. Who knows, perhaps the whole of a man's life between birth and death may be itself one long apprenticeship to what lies beyond!

All this, in some measure, is what the Entered Apprentice Degree means. The First Degree, in essence and final significance, stands on a parity with either of the other two. Masonry in all the plenitude of its being stands in it, and if there it does not utter its last word what it does utter is of importance equal to any other. If during his (too) brief career on probation a Brother Apprentice discovers that truth for himself, one may prophesy that all in the future will be well for him. His feet are set on a path that will lead him far, even to a way of living that is as fine and satisfying as any that the best men thus far have discovered, a way that bears the noble name of - THE MASONIC LIFE!

Two or three generations ago (and before) Lodges were small compared with Lodges today (in our State they average more than 215 members per Lodge). Masons, like other men, did very little moving about, but lived, most of them, in the same community from boyhood to old age; when entering a Lodge a Candidate entered into a lifelong fellowship with the same group of men. For that reason the members themselves were all the more careful to see that a newcomer was such a one as was fitted for so intimate a relationship, and once admitted they took great pains to assimilate him to their ways and customs. The older members, ripely experienced in all the intricacies of the Craft, were accustomed to play the part of the intender to an Apprentice, would take hold of him in a fatherly way to train him, to counsel him in his new duties, to rebuke him frankly for his faults. They were the “well informed Brethren” spoken of in the Lecture of the First Degree.

Suppose, Brother Entered Apprentice, that one of those old-fashioned Masonic sages was to sit down with you tonight to talk to you about your duties as a beginner. What would he say? We may be sure that he would talk with a disarming frankness, not sparing your self-conceit, or dodging behind timid circumlocutions. He would strike out straight from the shoulder. He would be direct and honest. He would give you that which nowadays has so much gone out of fashion; good sound advice. We could well imagine that he would say something like the following, in each case introduced by uncompromising “do’s” and “don’ts,” and we here, as doubtless would be the case with you, may well grant him the privilege of saying the last word. “Young man,” he would begin, “since you are now an Entered Apprentice,” and he would thus continue:

Make up your mind now never to betray any of the secrets of Masonry. Do not talk about them, even in a roundabout way, with outsiders. Most of the Ritual you must never write down, or print, or make use of anything written or printed by others; you have pledged your solemn word as a man not to do such a thing, and you must prove yourself to be a man of your word even in the privacy of your own home. The other portion of the Ritual may be written, and is, indeed, published in the Monitor printed by Grand Lodge, but even that is confidential among Masons only and does not belong to outsiders. Never discuss with anybody what occurs behind the tyled doors of the Lodge; never discuss petitioners, or why they were or were not elected to receive the Degrees; never discuss with anybody, even other members of your own Lodge, how or why you vote—you will not have a vote until you become a member, but I add this because it belongs to the rule of secrecy. If ever you go around gabbing about Lodge affairs outside our own circles you will prove false to your own words and will receive the contempt of your fellows.

While you are learning the Catechism of the First Degree learn it for once and all. Go over it again and again, drill it into your memory, engrave it so indelibly in your mind that you will never forget it. In the future, even long after you have become a Master Mason, rehearse it from time to time. Do not be content to learn it well enough merely to pass your examination; make it a permanent possession. You will need it in after years as much as you do now.

Give your Worshipful Master your respect and cooperation. He is the head of the Lodge, as much so in the First Degree as in the Third. What he says do, do without question. Do not discuss him fault-findingly with others. Speak respectfully of him and of his fellow Officers, and never speak disrespectfully of the Fraternity itself to any man. You do not confer honor upon the Craft by joining it; it conferred honor on you by receiving you.

Attend your Lodge as often as you can when it is open in your Degree. It is the one best school of Masonry. It does not expect you to attend if it will work an injury to yourself or family but does expect you to attend when it is possible to do so. When you became a Mason you pledged yourself to do that; see that you redeem your pledge. The Fraternity is not content merely to have your name in its books; it wants you to be an active worker. If a man is not willing to give a reasonable amount of time to his Lodge he should not petition for membership.

Consult with well-informed Brethren, especially with those who hold, or have held, responsible offices. They have learned by experience, not by hearsay, and theirs will be golden advice. Some who have been members for years remain so confused about Masonry, have studied it so superficially, that their advice is misleading; all the more reason, therefore, for seeking out the Brethren of seasoned experience to counsel with.

Do not be in a hurry to pass on to the next Degree. You have plenty of time before you. The First Degree is as worthy of careful study as the Second or Third. Take time to study it, reflect upon it, analyze its Ritual for yourself, and do not go forward until you have mastered it. You have nothing to gain by hurrying on; you have everything to gain by remaining where you are until you know yourself to be well prepared to advance to the next stage.

Read something about the First Degree. Make sure to get books written by competent and trustworthy Masonic scholars; what they have to give you will be of the utmost value to you in the future. You owe many things to the Fraternity, but nothing you owe is of greater importance than for you to understand Masonry, so that you will always know what you are doing, what you ought to do, how to do it, and will not, through blundering, bring discredit to yourself and trouble to your Lodge.

Think and reflect. The First Degree is not all secrecy and mystery. Much of it you can understand for yourself, without assistance, if you will give it your attention.

Never, anywhere or to anybody, be flippant about Masonry. To do so rains judgment down on your own head. It will prove you to have a misplaced sense of humor, or have made the blunder of taking as play-acting what is serious. There is an Altar at the center of the Lodge. A man must be on his knees when he becomes a Mason. There will be nothing more fatal to your future than for you to develop a blasphemous spirit of irreverence.

If, at this stage, you discover that Masonry is not what you expected it to be, if you cannot believe in it, if you cannot accept its teachings and principles with absolute sincerity, or if it does not interest you so that you will drop away from it with indifference, now is the time for you to stop. To some men Masonry opens up slowly, and they do not catch its spirit at first, or feel its appeal. This may prove to be the case with you.

Above all things make up your mind that you are going to be a Mason in dead earnest. It will grow upon you as you grow. You will always be finding something new in it; its horizon will travel beyond you. In the years to come you will thank the Grand Architect that you set your feet in its path.