

Assignment: College of the Consistory Master of the Symbolic Lodge
Submitted for the 20th Degree
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As the number 6 topical assignment for this 20th Degree essay stipulates with a direct question, "In your view, what is the fundamental obligation of a Lodge Master? Discuss ways in which this obligation is fulfilled," I have conducted research in Florida Masonic archives and respond accordingly. This topic is perhaps the crucible for consideration in attempting to explain the membership demise of the fraternity during the past several decades. No topic can be of more importance to the Fraternity (in Florida and nationwide) in light of the fact that total membership drops precipitously annually, and the universal perception among Florida Masons is that most Lodges no longer elect men of substance to the Master's chair, men who are capable of setting the proper example to the Brethren who are members of the Lodge. As stated in the syllabus for this essay, the assumption is that "the Master of the Symbolic Lodge is concerned above all else with being a practical philosopher." In that regard, his first and most important task is to internalize the knowledge, science, and philosophy of Masonry, and to dispense these important tenets, by his personal example, to his Brethren. I totally concur with these 20th Degree mandates, and thus this topic is of paramount interest to me as a Florida Mason. With these important precepts as the basis for promulgation of the 20th degree, I decided to contact the Grand Lodge of Florida in order to acquire the current official documentation used to train presumptive Lodge Masters in Florida. I did this in order to determine whether or not these 20th Degree precepts were included in the official training literature available to presumptive Lodge Masters in this state. It is from this perspective that I developed the following essay in response to question number 6 for the 20th Scottish Rite degree in the College of the Consistory curriculum.

Extensive pre preparation is critical to success as Lodge Master in the Masonic Fraternity. In Florida today, most men make little, if any, pre preparation as they move through the chairs toward the East, which process often results in poor performance as Lodge Master. Neither do experienced men in the Lodge often offer assistance through special meetings of Past Master's with the presumptive Master to offer such guidance. Such men should become totally informed before they reach the East. In fact, in smaller Lodges, sometimes a man joins the Lodge, and in his second year of membership is elected Lodge Master, as all other members have been to the East several times, and no longer want the responsibility again and again, year after year.

At the outset, I must state that having thoroughly read the material provided in the Grand Lodge of Florida Lodge Officers Training Course, the Handbook For Lodge Officers, and the Florida Digest of Masonic Law sections related to Lodge Officers and their behavioral requirements for performance as Lodge Master, I found no reference to the concepts stipulated for the 20th Scottish Rite Degree. Each of the afore referenced publications defines in detail the qualities needed by those who aspire to the East in the Lodge and the specific duties thereto appertaining, but none address the concepts outlined in the 20th degree (need to be a practical philosopher and to set the example for all Lodge brethren in the knowledge, science, and philosophy of Masonry). As expected, these documents do clearly, and in great detail, enumerate the specific tasks and responsibilities of the Master of the Lodge, but none of them address the higher order of responsibilities of this highest Masonic office as presented in the 20th degree. Perhaps it is this absence of consideration of these important and meaningful elements that has resulted in a dearth of real and substantial leadership by example in many of the Lodge Masters in Florida, leading many new Masons to cease activity in the Fraternity. In the past, men were often attracted to the Fraternity by observation of the example set by Masons in their community, who demonstrated the philosophy of Masonry in daily life. The character of such men attracted others of like character, and the fraternity therefore prospered in times past.

The listings of duties and responsibilities of Florida Lodge Officers included in the materials are comprehensive and detailed, and thus are very helpful, however, there is no consideration for setting the Masonic example philosophically to the brethren. There is one area that is of great interest in the literature and which approaches the content of the 20th Degree; I will quote briefly from it:

(referencing the Worshipful Master) "His zeal as a Mason should be overpowering, yet his approach should be understated. He must be morally upright and of good reputation in his community. His character and his loyalty to the Fraternity should be without question or blemish. The Worshipful Master must be an ardent student of the Masonic Law as well as its traditions and customs. His sense of duty, temperance, and fair play must be above reproach."

The above quote from the Florida Lodge Officer's Training Course, Worshipful Master's section, clearly does begin to approach the content of the 20th Degree, but does not directly address the example which must be set by that officer. I will quote further before I describe my personal views based on the 20th Degree in answer to the essay stipulations, the current state of Florida Lodge Masters, and the official literature on which they base their service. The following quotes immediately follow the above listed quote in the literature:

"If a Lodge recognizes a Brother as such a man and elevates him to the office of Worshipful Master, he is accorded respect and authority which have few equals in any areas of modern society. The Master is supreme in the Lodge. No decision can be appealed to the Lodge! The only things which limit the Worshipful Master's authority are his installation and vows and Charges, the Constitution, Resolutions, and Edicts of the Grand Lodge, the Rules and Regulations of his Lodge, and the ancient and established usages and customs of the Fraternity. With this seemingly unbridled authority, we can well see that the Worshipful Master must be firm but fair in his decisions. He should consider every official move most wisely, since the entire Lodge is dependant upon his acts.

The Master of a Lodge, first and foremost, must have learned well the lesson of self discipline (circumscribing his desires and keeping passions within bounds). Failure to do so and arbitrary, tyrannical exercise of his authority, will tear at the fiber of the Lodge and bury the Worshipful Master in disrespect by his Brethren.

NO LODGE WILL BE BETTER THAN ITS MASTER, THE SPRING WILL NOT RISE HIGHER THAN ITS FOUNTAIN, THE PUBLIC WILL MEASURE THE HONOR AND RESPECTABILITY OF THE LODGE BY ITS MASTER."

These quotes are taken from the aforementioned Grand Lodge of Florida official documents and they do approach the teachings of the 20th Degree as presented in the Scottish Rite. I do not know why the actual content of the 20th Degree is not more directly included in these materials, as certainly, some of the authors of the Florida Grand Lodge materials must have been recipients of the Scottish Rite Degrees. I am reminded however, that most Scottish Rite Masons in the Valley of which I am a member have little or no working knowledge of the content of the Scottish Rite Degrees by their own report. They experience the degrees, become 32nd Degree Scottish Rite Masons, and then never again study the Degree content. In deference to this statement, the members of the ritual teams at the Valley do have extensive and in depth knowledge of the degree which they present, but little knowledge of the other Degrees of the Scottish Rite. Thus, the task of the College of the Consistory, and the brilliance of its inception by Illustrious Brother Robert Davis for the promulgation of the meaningful teachings of the Scottish Rite Degrees, is of great importance to the

Fraternity. I am continually amazed at how few Scottish Rite members have taken the initiative to begin the College of the Consistory curriculum. This based on the paucity of knowledge of the Degrees that is the case with the average 32nd Degree Mason who attends the stated meetings of the Valley.

With the dwindling attendance at Valley meetings nationally and the annual decrease in membership, the College of the Consistory can become one of the catalysts that improves both current failings. That being said, we must consider the importance of the 20th Degree in improving the Fraternity at its apex, the Master of the Lodge position, and its historic demand that the Master of the Lodge exemplify all of the classic virtues of the Fraternity to the brethren and to the public. How then does the Master of the Lodge fulfill his obligation? In Florida, he should first take all training available in the specific responsibilities of the position long before he assumes the chair in the East. He should meet all of these specifics prior to his installation and be willing to accomplish them without question during his year in the East, and forever thereafter as Past Master of the Lodge. In addition, and more importantly, he must then live up to the content of the 20th Degree as these are the supreme demands of the correctly performing Master. By this I mean, he must go far beyond the tasks stipulated in any text on organizational leadership and the tenets of which are included in greatest detail in the Grand Lodge/Master of the Lodge training materials.

The Lodge Master must be a practical philosopher. For those Lodge Master's who are highly educated this task is more easily understood and practiced than for those who have never taken a course in philosophy or read a book on the subject. Does this mean that men who lack formal education cannot be successful Lodge Master's? Certainly not! It does suggest strongly, however, that a blue collar worker should be counseled by his educated brethren prior to moving to the East. In fact, such Lodge members should offer guidance to all men as they approach the East through the chairs in the Lodge. I further suggest that all men moving through the chairs be formally and informally trained and counseled from the Grand Lodge, and within the individual Lodge, regarding the content of the 20th Degree. What is more important than the concept of becoming the "practical philosopher" as the leader of the Lodge? I suggest that nothing is so detrimental, as an impractical man who has no philosophy, and can thus ruin an otherwise well run and historically strong Lodge. Many of us have seen this happen, the Lodge becomes split over some trivial dictated issue, and half of the membership ceases to attend or moves on to form another Lodge. A practical philosopher in the East can prevent such problems by carefully assisting the brethren in arriving at a suitable compromise. The 20th Degree clearly addresses this issue, and if followed, can resolve the conflict before it arises, by stipulation of a correct and accurate leadership philosophy in keeping with traditional Masonic wisdom.

The second concept put forward in the 20th Degree ritual is that of the first and most important task of the Lodge Master which is that he must internalize (thoroughly learn) all of the knowledge, science, and philosophy of Masonry. This clearly means that he will know all of the meanings and teachings included in the first three degrees of Masonic knowledge, and in addition, all of the material contained in the Digest of Masonic Law, and all training courses of the Grand Lodge inclusive of all training included in the primary appendant bodies of the order to which he belongs. In this sense, I firmly believe that any man moving to the East should become a Scottish Rite Mason so that he will have the other (29 degrees) content available to him as he attempts to lead his Lodge. I cannot imagine how much more successful a Master of a Lodge will be if he has the content of the 29 additional degrees at hand, especially the content of the 20th Degree.

The third concept included in the 20th degree (and perhaps the most important to the Master) is that he must be able to disperse the knowledge of the Fraternity to the membership and to the public by his personal example. As stated before, this behavior was the hallmark of the Mason of the past, and was the reason why the Fraternity became the largest such organization worldwide. Men in the community served by a Masonic Lodge wanted to become more like the Masons that they knew, as these men had purity of spirit and nobility of character which all who knew such men appreciated and revered. Today, the Fraternity has in large part lost this once strong quality. Often, in order to acquire membership numbers, a Lodge will allow men of low

character and minimal accomplishment become members. Such men then aspire to the chairs, and once they reach the East other members leave and new petitioners are negatively impressed, and therefore, do not join or terminate membership shortly after experiencing a weak or poor example of Masonic virtue in the East. As I consider this matter further, I honestly believe that the teachings included in the 20th Degree, if promulgated widely, could go a long way toward the goal of recreating interest in membership in the Fraternity world wide. It is certainly possible, that quality leadership from the East, as stipulated in the 20th Degree, could improve that August position of Master of the Lodge in future years in the Fraternal Blue Lodge.

Having discussed the above three major teachings inculcated in the 20th Degree ritual in light of the teachings of the Grand Lodge concerning Lodge Masters, I am compelled to discuss these teachings in some detail in terms of the content of the 20th Degree. In the 20th degree, the relevant basis of the future as described by the repetition or expansion of such interactions in history is a major conceptual tenet. The fact is, as the degree portrays, that no great Lodge Master event in history can have become successful without use of the behavioral concepts contained in the 20th Degree. He may acquire this perspective on his own, by his choice of life behaviors, and by his character, or he may acquire or enhance his natural abilities directly by acquisition of the Scottish Rite 20th Degree. Thus, one may learn these behaviors directly by a study of the Scottish Rite 20th Degree. One may never know in this life which of our experienced events or behaviors may be of positive benefit for use as Lodge Master. We are mandated in this degree, and as Masons and men, to act and behave in an exemplary manner as we have learned during our lifetimes. Current behavior and future behavior is certainly governed by the statements and behaviors of the past as stipulated in this Scottish Rite Degree ritual.

As stated earlier in this essay, an apparent weakness in our Scottish Rite today is that most men experience the degrees, but never actually learn the detail of the content of each degree. I know this is the case in our current Valley program here in Florida, as when I ask even mundane questions during the education phase of each Valley stated meeting, no one in the assembled member crowd at the meal, or meeting, has any response. Most, in fact, have no idea of the very names of the Scottish Rite bodies or what they represent, and here I include those men currently seated in the East in each body in the valley. Often they are there only to attain a title or an insignia or pin, rather than to give consideration to the meaning and content of each of the degrees in their particular body of the order. Thus, the transfer of knowledge to future generations appears to be stopped cold at that point. I have always liked Pike's commentary that, "It is the Dead that govern. The Living only obey." Can this be true for the Scottish Rite Mason if the ritual is not attended and studied carefully throughout life? Without the answer to this question, Scottish Rite membership means little or nothing to its members. Perhaps that is why with more than 1000 dues paid members only 30 or 40 attend the monthly meeting in the Valley of which I am a member.

The synopsis of this consideration in the 20th degree is that we should attempt with our best lifelong effort to be Lodge Masters in terms described clearly in the 20th Degree. We must exhibit organizational leadership, but we must go far beyond this in our lives and as Lodge Masters. We must acquire a practical philosophy as the direct purveyor of Masonic principles, and/or all of our behavior, and we must also evidence lifelong learning to others so that they too will acquire knowledge as stipulated by the College of the Consistory. Further, we must study the science and philosophy of Masonry, the study of which is a lifelong task. If we earnestly seek these high goals of lifelong learning, and if we therefore set an example in the Lodge and in public, the Fraternity will reemerge as a force for good in the world. This is the lesson of the 20th Scottish Rite Degree. Can these important teachings improve Masonry if studied and acted on behaviorally? I believe they can be if we promulgate them widely in the Craft. That task is the duty of the Adepts in the College of the Consistory.