

## **Ancient Freemasonry's Lessons for Today (The Past Master Lecture)**

Freemasonry as known to our ancient Brethren was a series of moral lessons conveyed by secret ritual, miracle plays, dramas, music, ceremonies and symbolism. These lessons were taught in spare time, on church and civil holidays, and in the evenings.

Ancient Lodges consisted of groups of men working on the erection of great buildings. They not only designed and supervised the construction, but they also educated young men in the arts, sciences, and morals. Those who were so educated became great masters of engineering and architecture, and their designs, many still standing, have won the admiration of every age.

A modern version of this system would be found in our colleges of Architecture and Engineering, not in those who erect the buildings. Think of our ancient brethren as students looking for a thorough education in the arts and sciences and think of the Masters of the Lodges as their teachers.

The system of education used by our ancient Brethren was called the apprentice system. Young men of good character were entered in the Lodges as apprentices under the guidance of a Master known to be a good leader and teacher.

The Master was not only responsible for the technical training of his apprentices, but was also responsible for their moral and spiritual development. This phase of education, developed in the ancient Lodges in a long and complicated system of lessons dealing with religion, history, and morality, is the part of their educational system that has been passed on to us and is what we now refer to as "Speculative Freemasonry".

As the young apprentices developed their abilities the more ambitious aspired to positions of leadership, much as young men do today. They then became candidates for the position of Master. To achieve this they studied and trained themselves, and in order to advance they presented a piece of work of their own design completed under their own direction. This became known as their Master Piece. If it was accepted by the other Masters, and if their knowledge proved satisfactory, they were accepted as Masters, and when elected by the other Masters were allowed to preside over Lodges.

Among our ancient brethren the stonemason, who was not proficient in the lessons of architecture and engineering, was not allowed to learn the secret moral lessons of our Order, which distinguish it from other orders and have caused it to endure through the ages. Such Masons only worked in dry masonry, constructed without mortar. They were known as Cowans and never joined the Lodge. Men who have no sense of social duty, who have not learned to cement society with love, and who have no love for their fellow man can never understand Freemasonry.

We are the builders of spiritual edifices. During the course of our Masonic journey we will learn from those who have gone before us, and now will use that knowledge to make our world and ourselves a better place. Let us live our lives both privately and publicly in a manner that will inspire others, and let us realize that Freemasonry is a power today as in the past to build lofty

character, to ennoble the mind, to purify the soul- in fact, to cause every man to travel the level of time upright and erect before God and our fellow man.