

Abolition of the Past Master Degree

M. E. Comp. Matthias H. Henderson, as before, has Canada under his special eye. He had before him the proceedings for 1897, and writes eulogistically of M. E. Comp. J. Ross Robertson.

The Grand Z.'s address is of more than local interest. It contains so much that may be read with profit by those beyond the borders of Canada, that we will make more extended extracts from it than we usually do from such documents."

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He quotes that portion of our introductory remarks regarding the Past Master's degree and says:

"We presume Comp. B. means to say, if it is permitted to exist in the Chapter it will have an unpleasant time of it. Unless we have been mistaken in our understanding of the action in Canada, the Degree has only been transferred from the Chapter to the Lodge. We have not understood that our Canadian friends have abolished it. We have such high regard for it in Pennsylvania that it will exist here as long as Masonry exists, which, we expect, will be for some time. All of our writing about it has not been against it, as a degree, but against the improper use to which it has been put."

The degree has not been transferred to the Lodge companion because it has always been there under the name of "Installed Master," and is conferred upon a brother elected to and seated in the east as Worshipful Master of his lodge and in the presence of Past Masters only, who for the time being constitute a "Board of Installed Masters." He becomes a Past Master on the expiration of his term of office and the installation of his successor. The degree known as the Past Master and which was conferred under Chapter authority as a prerequisite to the Royal Arch degree has been eliminated, the curriculum now embracing the Mark, Most Excellent and Royal Arch.

The possibilities for tom-foolery and horseplay furnished by the degree have been taken advantage of to such an extent that for many years it has been a blot and reproach. The fact that it was open to so many of the younger members of the Craft who from lack of knowledge failed to distinguish, has been a hurt and menace to the dignity which the genuine Past Master's position demanded. Of the latter were hundreds, not belonging to the Royal Craft but to whom for the reason stated, the mere mention of the degree was repugnant in the extreme, and their influence was invariably directed to discouraging any idea of advancement. Even with the funny element omitted these brethren could never be made to understand why young brethren should be seated in the oriental chair and given a title that in the ordinary course of events they never would otherwise attain, and herein they regarded it as a burlesque.

These and many other cogent arguments against its retention, as well as its traditional claims to antiquity and the probabilities of differences of opinion with sister jurisdictions, were all

weighed and considered before final action. Those who were surprised at the unanimity with which the reform was received by Grand Chapter are none the less gratified at the absence after three years' trial of even a single expression of a desire to have it restored. On the contrary, the evidences are manifest that its abolition has done good.

Sources:

Proceedings of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Canada at the annual convocation, 1899, report on Foreign Correspondence - PENNSYLVANIA