

THE INVESTIGATING COMMITTEE

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As I constantly search for reasons why our meetings are so sparsely attended and why so many of our members simply drop out due to lack of interest after they receive the degrees, I am becoming more and more convinced that the listless attitude of most of our investigating committee is the primary cause. I wonder how many lodges in the jurisdiction consider it a formality and not a necessity. I have checked on a few by asking candidates if anyone called on them prior to their conferral and the answer was invariably in the negative. Here, perhaps, is the weakest link in the entire Masonic chain. After a petition for the degrees in Masonry is received, the first test the candidate must pass is the inquiry of the Investigating Committee. Approved by this committee, only an unfavourable ballot will prevent his initiation into the lodge. Once in, about all that will get him out is non-payment of dues. Expulsion is very rare. Having taken him the lodge is stuck with him. Obviously, therefore, the responsibility of the Investigating Committee is grave indeed, and in the proper discharge of this duty, the skill of a biographer, the integrity of a saint and the wisdom of a judge are required. Because of this, members selected to serve on this Committee should be chosen with care. Preferably they should be brethren little, if at all, acquainted with the petitioner, to avoid any possibility of bias - consciously or unconsciously exerted.

Some investigations amount to little more than looking to see who recommended the petitioner. If the names of active or prominent members are on the petition, a Past Master or two perhaps, or maybe personal friends of one or more of the investigators, the inclination is to end the investigation right there. If those brethren know the man and approve him, why check further?

One reason is this: many a petition gets before a lodge simply because the recommending brothers lacked the courage, tact or loyalty to risk offending a friend or acquaintance by refusing to sign his petition. They reason that this unpleasant duty can be avoided by passing the responsibility to the Investigating Committee and subsequently to the lodge, where rejection can be made anonymously. Such procedure is unmasonic, but it does happen and many an undesirable member gets in through that back door.

It is also true that, in spite of a strict injunction to use great care in recommending applicants, many among us hesitate little at signing almost any petition. If some brother whom we know asks us to sign a petition for him, too often we do it without any real consideration of what is involved. This again is unmasonic and puts a real burden on the committee chosen to investigate the petitioner.

Knowing these faults and facts, how should an Investigating Committee function? Some of the information is more or less routine and easily gathered. The vital question the investigating committee must be able to answer is: Is he worthy and well qualified? This is where the real investigating comes in and is where failure is most often found. It is not necessary to enquire how much money a man has in the bank or how much insurance he carries. His signed petition declares he is able to meet his obligation as a member.

The question: "Is he worthy and well qualified?" must be answered in the affirmative before the candidate can proceed further. This means he must possess both the character and reputation meriting acceptance by the Craft and will form the basis of Masonic life. Character is not created overnight. It is the distilled essence of a man's reaction to the life forces that affect him. Its formation begins at birth - or even before - if we accept the principle of heredity. What it is when he applies for the degrees of Masonry has been determined largely by its past development and this, in turn, will determine to some extent his progress in Masonry. Therefore, complete but diligent inquiry should be made covering an adequate period of the petitioner's past.

Frequent visits to the petitioner in his home are omitted entirely and this is one of the gravest mistakes made by an investigating committee. Additional inquiries will develop what his reputation is and has been. Skillful interviews with the man himself in his home will go far to reveal what he actually is and thinks. Much can be learned by observation alone. Attempted discussion of Masonry would be pointless since he knows nothing of it. But adroitly managed discussion of subjects with which masonry is concerned, such as neighborliness, duty, faithfulness to obligations, charity, education and self-control, will bring out the required facts. When all that has been learned is assembled, the investigator who has served honestly will know whether or not the petitioner is worthy and well-qualified. And to discover

what is the high and vital duty of each and every brother appointed on such a committee.