

## FREE BORN

By W. Bro. C.B. Lawless.

The Masonic fraternity seeks to establish to its own satisfaction that a prospective candidate for its mysteries and membership thereof will be comfortable in a society which requires the highest moral and ethical standards from members. Having satisfactorily answered the probing questions of an enquiry committee, and has had his application favourably considered by the members of the lodge, a man becomes a candidate for Initiation.

Before he is actually Initiated, he is required to answer, in the presence of the members of the Lodge, that he has not been coerced or unduly influenced to seek membership, and that his application for membership is entirely voluntary. An affirmative answer to these questions establishes his moral and mental fitness to be allowed to become a Mason.

He is now asked to establish other things about himself which relate directly to his physical and civil status. he is asked if he is a man, free-born, and of the full age of 21 years. The reason for these questions need to be examined.

He is asked if he is a man because the regular Masonic fraternity does not permit women to become members. The members also want to be sure that he is of mature age and legally responsible for his actions, and in most countries this means that he is at least 21 years of age.

But, reference to "free-born" in this day and age poses a problem for thinking Masons. What we in the New World and Europe understand by "slavery" was abolished more than a century ago, and so any candidate for Freemasonry today could not have been born under that system. The question, therefore, obviously cannot relate to this system of human bondage which was a factor of life in past centuries.

So, what are we asking our candidate to reply to?

All the other questions are clear and unequivocal, and any candidate can understandably reply to them. But, how should he react to a question which implies that perhaps he could have been born into some form of slavery or restraint? Are we trying to imply that we know of some such form of slavery or restraint existing in our present day society, and that we would like to be sure that he is not a product to that society or institution?

Two hundred years ago slavery was a fact of life and impacted on many aspects of human life. It is therefore not surprising that at that time in history, it was a factor to be considered in relation to anyone wanting to become a Freemason.

Without going into the details of slavery or those who were slaves, it is reasonable to assume that our Masonic predecessors who governed the fraternity and wrote its rituals, could have decided, in their wisdom, that slaves, or those born to slaves, were unsuitable candidates for membership in the Order. Because of this, the requirement that a man must be "free-born" to qualify for membership was incorporated in the ritual.

Some years after the abolition of slavery, a body of thinking Freemasons under the English Constitution, realized there could be some men who met every other requirement for candidature for Freemasonry, with the exception that they were born to parents who were at the time of their births, slaves. Albion Lodge, No. 196, E.R. petitioned the Grand Lodge of England to delete the word "born" from "free born" for the reason mentioned. This change was subsequently made and the requirements under that Constitution now states that the man be "free."

On a closer analysis this requirement is meaningful in a Masonic sense, whereas the "free born" aspect remains meaningless. A man can be "free born" and still not be "free." He could be indebted or committed to another individual or group in such a way as to enable him or them to apply undue pressure on the man to disclose any or all of our secrets. So it is far more important to know that a man is free from encumbrances of any kind than to know that he was not born into slavery. It is unworthy of Freemasonry to consider what a man's mother [or father] was, or did, when assessing the son's qualifications for joining our Order.

We assess the man in his own right.

Everything we say and do in our lodges is logical, or has an allegorical examination. If there is something we say or do in lodge which meets this criterion, it should be examined dispassionately with a view of amending or expunging it.

By W. Bro. C. B. Lawless; Brant Lodge, No. 663, G.L.C.P.O.; Albion Lodge, No. 196 (E.C.); Union Lodge, No. 7551 (E.C.); Conception Lodge No. 8364 (E.C.) and Lodge Pelican, No. 1750 (S.C.).

Submitted by D. Roy Murray  
King Solomon Lodge, No. 58, GRS