

In parliamentary law a motion thus made, seconded, and reduced to writing comes at once into the possession of the House. But in the practice of Masonry another step is to be taken before we can arrive at that condition. The autocratic power of the Master, presiding officer of Lodge, make him the only and final arbiter of questions of order. The Master may, therefore, declare that the motion is not in order—that is, not capable of being entertained—and decide that it shall not be received; and from this decision there can be no appeal. The motion must be passed over without discussion; or, if the Master neglects or omits to make such ruling, it is competent for any member to make a similar objection, which objection shall be duly considered by the Master Without any debate.

When motion in a masonic Lodge is thus made, seconded, reduced to writing, and not overruled on a point of order by the Master, the Lodge is then placed in possession of it. The Master reads it from the chair, and says, "Are you ready for the question?" If no one desires to discuss its merits, the vote is to be immediately taken in the form hereafter to be described. But if there is a difference of opinion among the members, some being in favor of and others opposed to it, a debate will ensue, which constitutes the second stage of the proceedings.

CHAPTER VIII.

OF THE DEBATE, AND HOW IT SHALL BE CONDUCTED.

Debates in a masonic Lodge must be conducted according to the fraternal principles of the institution. In the language of Dr. Oliver, "the strictest courtesy shall be observed during a debate, in a Mason's Lodge, on questions which elicit a difference of opinion; and any gross violation of decorum and good order is sure to be met by an admonition from the chair." It must be always remembered, that the object of a Masonic discussion is to elicit truth, and not simply to secure victory. Hence, those means of suppressing due enquiry, which are so common in popular assemblies, are to be avoided; therefore it is that the motion for the *previous question*, so frequently resorted to by parliamentary strategists, as a means of stifling debate and silencing the voice of the minority, is never admitted in a masonic Lodge. The discourtesy which such a motion exhibits on the part of the majority, and its evident object to prevent inquiry, make it entirely antagonistic to the benign principles of the Order.

"Freemasonry," says Bro. B. B. French, himself a master of the science of parliamentary law, in an article in the *American quarterly Review of Freemasonry*, "knows no 'previous question,' and no masonic body should ever tolerate it."

When, in a debate, a brother desires to speak, he rises and addresses the chair. The presiding officer calls him by his name, and thus recognizes his right to the floor. While he is speaking, he is not to be interrupted by any other member, except on a point of order. If called to order by any member, the speaker is immediately to take his seat until the point is stated, when the Master will make his decision without debate. The speaker will then rise and resume his discourse, if not ruled out by the Master. During the time that he is speaking, no motion is permissible. Every member is permitted to speak once on the subject under discussion; nor can he speak a second time, except by permission of the Master.