

Although we can find no regulation to this effect in any of the ancient constitutions, yet the constant and universal usage of the Craft has given to it the force of an unwritten law, and the reason for its existence must be sought in the symbolic character of our institution and its original connection with an operative art. The candidate for masonry has always been considered, symbolically, as material brought up for the building of the Temple. This material must be rejected or accepted. It cannot be carried elsewhere for further inspection. The Lodge to which it is first brought must decide upon its fitness. To withdraw the petition would be to prevent the Lodge from making their decision, and therefore no petition for initiation, having been once read, can be withdrawn; it must go through the necessary forms: and therefore a motion to withdraw it would be clearly out of order.

A different regulation prevails in Commanderies of Knights Templar. Grand Master B. B. French made, while presiding over the Order in this country, a decision in the following words:

"Commanderies, have exclusive power to decide all questions concerning membership, must decide all questions concerning petitions therefor by vote—such as whether or not a petition may be withdrawn &c."

This decision was approved and confirmed by the Grand Encampment, at its session in 1862, at Columbus.

It is surprising that one so experienced as Grand Master French in parliamentary usage should have clothed the language of his decision in such ambiguous and inaccurate phraseology. From its terms we can gather only, and that merely by application, that in a Commandery a petition for membership (which we may suppose to include a petition for initiation) may be withdrawn by a vote of the body. But we are left in doubt whether that vote shall be a vote of the majority, of two-thirds, or the unanimous vote of all present. We must therefore apply the ordinary rules of interpretation of documents and the principles of analogy, to enable us to determine what sort of vote is required to authorize the withdrawal of a petition which has been presented to a Commandery.

Now, we cannot say that the word "vote" means in this decision a *majority vote*, or a *two-thirds vote*, because, as the context declares that "all questions concerning petitions" for membership are to be decided by vote, this would include questions on admission as well as withdrawal and thus it would follow that a ballot for admission need not be unanimous, which would be contrary to the recognized statutes of the Order, as well as the settled law of Masonry in its other branches.

In this uncertainty we must come to the conclusion, that the decision settles only one point—namely, that a Commandery may entertain a question as to the withdrawal of a petition for membership, which by a very liberal construction we may extend to petitions for initiation. But as the decision is entirely silent as to what number of votes is necessary to decide that question, we must settle that point by a reference to the character of the question, and to the manner in which questions of a similar character are settled.

Now, it is a rule in all Commanderies that every petition for initiation, when presented, must be referred to a committee, and on the report of that committee be subjected to a ballot. While this rule is in force, no petition can be withdrawn. A motion to withdraw it is equivalent to a motion to suspend the rule. It will be seen hereafter that no Masonic