

Tell The World

Unknown

“Neither are you to suffer your zeal for the Institution to lead you into an argument with those who, through ignorance, may ridicule it.” This cautionary sentence in the Charge to an Entered Apprentice deserves more elaboration than it usually receives; he sits in a good lodge, the Worshipful Master of which instructs both the new and the older brethren in regard to many matters connected with the Fraternity which are in no sense secret, yet which strike the profane as peculiar, odd, sometimes even ridiculous.

Masonry needs no defense before the world, from her members or anyone else. Yet what the individual may intend just as a criticism may often require a reasonable answer. The Mason who understands his Freemasonry, and so can make such a reasonable answer, is not “arguing with ignorance” but spreading light; if he really knows whereof he speaks, he may speak without profit to himself and honor to the Fraternity.

Perhaps nothing in the Fraternity has caused more criticism from the outside world than the well-known disposition of Master Masons to prefer Masons to non-Masons as objects of relief, as business connections, as social comrades. The world says, in effect: “What right has Masonry to say that Masons are more worthy of charity than non-Masons; that business men who are Masons have a better right to business from Masons than non-Masons; that the Fraternity can put any stamp upon a man which makes him socially more desirable than the man who is not initiated?”

Especially do we hear from those whose doctrinal beliefs are stronger than their knowledge of the New Testament:

“Don’t you Masons know that charity should be for all, and no preference should be shown to one worthy object above another?” Usually such a criticism may be silenced by quoting St. Paul, the Epistle to the Galatians, Chapter 6, verse 10:

“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”

Although a Mason is repeatedly abjured to make his charity universal, he is also told, when bidden to relieve the distressed, “more especially a brother Mason.” He has excellent precedent,

since St. Paul qualified his “good unto all men” with “especially unto them who are of the household of faith” – that is, to those who are of his church, his beliefs, were his friends and brethren.

Masons maintain Masonic Homes for the unfortunate among their brethren, their widows and orphans – and often for their sisters, daughters, sons, fathers and mothers! No Masonic teaching instructs that a Mason should not contribute to other charities. The continually insistent teaching of charity through all the degrees, especially the entered Apprentice Degree; the continual reminder of the importance of charity in opening and closing all lodges, do put emphasis upon Masonic brethren, but exclude no one from Masonic charity.

In the monitorial work about the “Bee Hive,” in the Master Mason Degree, we are taught of the advantages of dependence. Without dependence; societies, nations, families and congregations could not be formed or exist. But the very solidity of the group, predicated upon mutual independence, also creates this idea of distinction in relief or friendship or business as between those without and those within the group. This feeling is universal. The church gives gladly to all good works, but most happily to relieve those of its own faith. Our government considers the welfare of its own nationals before that of the nationals of other governments. The head of a family will not deny his own children clothes to put a coat upon the back of the naked child of his neighbor. Those we know best, those closest, those united in the tightest bonds, come first with us the world over and in every form of union.

Naturally then, a Mason is taught that while charity is in theory for all, in practice it is for “more especially a brother Mason.”

What is true of charity is true of business and of social intercourse. It is false teaching that Masonry should bring business to any man because he is a Mason. It is good Masonic instruction that a Mason should give business to his brother. That a Mason who thinks of the stranger who wears a Masonic pin, “What can he do for me?” is not a good Mason. He who sees the pin and thinks. “What may I do for him?” is a true brother. To give one’s custom to a Mason is to practice the tie of brotherhood; to ask for business from a Mason because of their brotherhood is to belie it.

Other things being equal, a brother prefers to deal with a brother, a son with a father and a father with his sons.

Other things being equal, a Mason prefers to deal with a Mason. But if other things are not equal, no obligation predicates business upon Masonry. It is wholly a matter of desire, of a wish to serve the brother for whom the heart feels affection.

Some manners and customs peculiarly Masonic arouse the unthinking laughter of those who understand them not. No need for argument regarding them exists, but sometimes an honest question deserves an honest answer.

The psychologist finds in the grandiloquent titles of officers in some fraternal orders what he calls “an avenue of escape from reality.” His theory is that many a man whose success in the world is but modest, finds a satisfaction in its eminence in being called Most Exalted High Chief Sachem of the Purple Palace, which he never obtains in the mundane world.

The non-Masonic student of psychology hearing of “Worshipful Master” and “Most Worshipful Grand Master” often thinks Masonry has adopted high-sounding titles for similar reasons.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The Wycliffe Bible (Matthew xix 19) reads: “Worship thi fadir and thi modir.” The authorized Version translates “Worshipful to “honor” – “honor thy father and thy mother.” In parts of England today one hears the Mayor spoken of as “Worshipful;” the word is used in its ancient sense as meaning one worthy, honorable, to be respected. “Worshipful” as applied to the Master of a lodge, does not mean the we should bow down to him in adoration, as does the word when used in its ecclesiastical sense.

We “Worship” God, but not men. Our Masters, in being called “Worshipful” are not (as some ignorant critics have said) being put by us in the same class with God, but are paid tribute of respect in the language of two or more centuries ago.

Several distinct meanings attached to the word “grand.” The most common is (Funk and Wagnalls dictionary) “of imposing character or aspect, magnificent in proportion, extent.” In this way we speak of the Capital at Washington as “grand;” the nation as a “grand country,” the coronation of the King of England as a “grand” ceremony.

But “grand” has another meaning. The same dictionary specifies that it connotes “preeminence of rank or order, of prime importance, principal.” In this sense we speak of a “grand” parent, a “grand” jury, a “grand” total. And it is in this sense that we have a Grand Lodge – not that it is magnificent, beautiful, gorgeous, but “grand” in that it is first, primary, principal.

Hence the Most Worshipful Grand Master of the Grand Lodge means simply “The Master, most worthy of respect of the lodge which is preeminent in rank in Masonry.” There is nothing in common with such an expression, which has the respectability of a great antiquity behind it, and “Ineffable Exalted High Cockalorum of the Enchanted Palace of the Seventh Heaven” or any other similar collection of meaningless words used to describe the titular head of some mushroom fraternal order. He who considers our titles in this class is to be pitied for his ignorance and may be enlightened at his request. Masonic lodges are seen in public only on three occasions; when conducting the funeral of a deceased brother, when attending Divine services in a group, and when laying cornerstones of public buildings.

Our public contacts with the profane world are thus infrequent. The comparative unfamiliarity of the public with the proper dress of a Mason must be at the root of the idea that white aprons are “funny” or “rather silly.”

Undeniably, a white apron is not sartorially considered a decorative addition to conventional dress! But neither is the surplice of an Episcopalian minister, the head dress of an orthodox Jewish Rabbi, or the silk hat of the formal opera goer a thing of beauty.

The badge of a Mason has the respectability and the symbolism of a great antiquity. We may not go with some enthusiastic researchers into Masonic lore as far as the Garden of Eden, and say that the apron is the modern prototype of the fig leaves worn by our first ancestors, but in the most ancient religions of Israel, Egypt, Chaldea and the Orient; we discover that the apron, in one form or another, was of symbolic significance. In the mysteries of Mithras, in Persia, candidates were invested with a white apron. Old carvings, venerable statues, the remnants of ancient writings thousands of years old all show that the apron was a part of the formal dress in many religions and initiations.

The apron was a practical matter to stone masons; it protected the person of the wearer from chafing and injury; and, when equipped with a pocket, provided the wearer with a convenient receptacle for the chisel and common gavel.

When the ancient society changed from Operative to Speculative, the tools of a Mason became symbols for moral instruction; the practical dress of the hewer of stone, the honorable badge of a Freemason. When this is made known to the profane, he no longer sees in our clothing any reason for laughter.

It takes all kinds of people to make a world, and it would be a dull one if we all thought and acted alike! Being human, Freemasonry has all kinds of men in her ranks. Each takes from the Ancient Craft according to his vision, his ability, his knowledge and his desire. To some it is holy, sacred, a great and glorious opportunity; a real and vital force; uplifting and ennobling. To others a lodge is just a place to go, a group of good fellows to meet and know.

It is from these that we hear of the "Masonic Goat" and the supposed "terrors" of the third degree. Also, so real are these supposed features of our initiation that the "third degree" has become the name for the physical and mental tortures practiced by the police to extort information from unwilling suspects.

Let every interested Freemason lift up his voice when seriously interrogated regarding the Masonic goat! He violates no "secret" when he declares that Freemasonry is serious from the first to the last; that it partakes in no way of the character of initiation of college fraternities, or the Mystic Shrine, both of which, although they have their serious moments, are devoted to making a candidate unhappy for the pleasure of his brethren-to be.

Our third degree was not called the Sublime Degree of Master Mason because it contained a butting goat! Masons think upon the pitiful tragedy and the exalted lessons of the Master's degree with reverence. No good Mason suffers them to be soiled with the idea of ribald fun, goats, mechanical tortures or other jokes supposedly played upon candidates, if it is in his power to prevent it with a quiet word of truth.

The Entered Apprentice is charged not to let zeal lead to argument, yet the last words of the charge are concerned with “the honor, glory and reputation of the institution,” by which the world at large may be convinced of its good effects.”

Argue not, but do not refuse the courteous answer to the legitimate question as to the public contacts of Freemasonry with the world which, seen in the light of the reasons behind them, are no longer pegs on which to hang a garment of laughter, but beautiful symbols, teaching rich lessons to those who understand.

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