

BY PRECEPT AND EXAMPLE

This Short Talk Bulletin was written by Brother Frederick H. Lauder, a zealous and active member of Monmouth Lodge No. 37, Monmouth, Illinois, who was raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason in January, 1919. He has practiced law in Monmouth since 1922, except when on duty in the Navy during World War 11. We thank him for this perceptive view of the Craft.

In the South Atlantic, it is said that many miles up the Amazon River in a small clearing there is a Cadillac Sedan. There are no roads in the vicinity; there is only a shelter over it; and there it stands on the shore. About once a week, the tribal chief and two or three of his wives come over and sit in it for a couple of hours. The engine is not started. Not a wheel moves, but there it has stood for about thirty years. Someone once told the chief that he should have one and showed him a picture in a brochure. Through a missionary, the story goes, he corresponded with the General Motors representative in Recife. They sent the shiny new Cadillac up the river on a barge, unloaded it on the bank and there it has stood ever since. A wonderful piece of machinery and metal body, but absolutely useless, and has been for thirty years, because no one does or can use it except the chief and his wives.

Pretty stupid, you say, and you are right! Before you go too far in condemning the chief, however, let me tell you another. The story is told that at about the turn of the century, when English noblemen were rich and before taxation became so bad, a nobleman sailed his seagoing yacht into dry dock near South Hampton to have its bottom scraped. According to the yarn, the nobleman lived aboard during the process and when it was completed, he decided to stay awhile longer. In fact, the ship stayed there in the graving dock for over twenty years. There it was, a ship valued at over ~ 50,000 occupying a drydock for which the nobleman paid thousands of pounds per year for occupancy. It had a crew aboard, officers and men. It was fully equipped to go to sea, but it never did until the nobleman died and his executors took over. Here was a beautiful yacht, a crew and capacity to carry its owner and friends to every port in the world, but it never moved. In fact, it never even floated. How can there be such waste, you ask? Here was an educated English nobleman, tying up for years what could have been enjoyed by him and many of his friends. We can excuse the chief with his Cadillac, but an educated, intelligent man! It defies explanation!

One more example, if you please. On one of the Thousand Islands where Lake Ontario narrows into the St. Lawrence River, there is a castle, built by a wealthy American, where he and his wife expected to live the remaining years of their lives. He built it for her, and the location is so beautiful that it defies description. The castle is built of stone and has literally every convenience that was known fifty years ago. Unfortunately, the wife died before they could move in and the surviving husband never did. He loved his wife dearly and could not think of occupying the castle without her. The castle has never been occupied. There it stands on this exquisitely beautiful island in the St. Lawrence, gradually falling victim to the passage of time.

How utterly tragic, you say, and rightly so. We can excuse the chief, possibly, but what can we say for the English nobleman or the wealthy American? It is unbelievable that so much of value can be wasted when it could mean so much to the individuals and many more of their friends. Before we go too far in condemning them, let us go to the looking glass and look at ourselves.

Our Masonic teachings, its philosophy, its literature can be lumped together, and how can we ignore them? Great philosophers have given us wonderful ideas and visions of the Eternal. Writers have preserved their thoughts in literature, pamphlets and books, which would be of inestimable value if we would take the time to read them and reflect upon them. Grand Lodges publish pamphlets galore and the Masonic Service Association can give us countless subjects to study. What do we do with them? If we pick them up, we put them in our pockets but never read them. We may take them home and lay them on the library table or leave them in the pockets until we send the suit to the cleaner, who dumps them in the rubbish bin. Why cannot we see that we have treasures like the chief's Cadillac, the Nobleman's yacht or the castle on the St. Lawrence, which, while beautiful, could be much more beautiful if used?

We attend communications of our lodges where officers pour out their hearts trying to show us that Masonry is beautiful, but is more beautiful when put to use. It is said of the Chinese that when you are trying to convince them of something, they listen intently, smile politely, applaud dutifully, and do nothing.

If it were not true, it would not hurt so badly. We are not alone, however. Isaiah first commented on this characteristic when he said, "Hear ye indeed but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not." (IS. 6:9) This was repeated by Jesus when he said, "By hearing ye shall hear and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive." (Matt. 12: 12-14)

In the Islamic traditions (Hadith) it is written, "The Prophet prayed, 'O, my Lord, do not let the sun set on any day during which I did not increase in knowledge'."

Our trouble appears to be that we gladly and willingly take in candidates who are eventually raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason, but do not work on the Master Masons now on our rolls, to make better Masons out of them. In the inside cover of the pamphlet to be given to Master Masons in Illinois when they are raised is the following Foreword:

"Very few who are raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason, realize at the time the full implications of the ceremony. Yet it is vitally important that the deeper meanings of this degree be understood of one who is to become a Master Mason in fact as well as in name."

You have heard the expression "In one ear and out the other." Regrettably, that is how some of our ageless principles and ideals affect some of our Master Masons. Why? If each of us appoints himself a committee of one to remind our Brothers of the wording of some of our obligations, some of the fine ideals we have pledged ourselves to observe, we may be able to influence our Brothers to understand some of the things they have heard repeatedly in our lodge halls during our initiations and to see and perceive the value of some of our high aspirations.

As my lodge has many farmers on its rolls, perhaps this illustration will make the point clearer.

What would you think of a farmer who paid \$80,000.00 for a self-propelled combine and kept it in the shed year after year, never using it on his farm? Would you not think him a lunatic? Yet we spend hours learning our ritual and attending communications, but do not use what we have learned as it ought to be used. Are we to be classed with the jungle chief, the rich Nobleman who never took his ship to sea, and the rich man who built his castle but never lived in it?

Lodge officers cannot use force to make members read Masonic literature, nor would it be appropriate to offer monetary rewards to influence them to do so. If your word is good, please remember your pledge "to improve myself in Masonry" and convert your solemn agreement into action.

Most Worshipful Brother Dwight L. Smith (PGM, Ind.), in a recent issue of The Indiana Freemason, summed it up this way:

"The person who yearns to be a bit above the average can climb several rungs on the ladder of excellence--first, by refusing to be content with mediocrity, then by lifting his standards to the highest possible level of attainment and working unceasingly to O measure up to those standards.

"It all adds up to the fact that the purpose of Freemasonry is and always has been to take a good man--just one at a time-- and try by our teachings to make a better man out of him.

"The real, lasting purpose of Freemasonry is to persuade men, through the lessons in our Work, to enter upon the pursuit of excellence. Sadly enough, that isn't in fashion these days. The popular course to pursue is to slide downward into mediocrity--and in some areas, the more mediocre, the better.

"Excellence in what form? In just about every form you can think of--in morals, in manners, in speech, in dress, in the quality of our leadership, in the attitude of our Brethren toward the Ancient Craft Lodge, the basic unit of all Freemasonry! "What better way for American Freemasonry to play its role in the latter years of the 20th Century than to quietly, firmly, insistently call for excellence on the part of every man who petitions our lodges and who remains a member of our gentle Craft? "What greater service would we render than to nail the standard of excellence to the mast and keep it there!"

The challenge for each of us is contained in the Charge:

"You are now bound by duty, honor, and gratitude to be faithful to your trust, to support the dignity of your character on every occasion, and to enforce, by precept and example, obedience to the tenets of the Fraternity. "