

ENLIGHTENING THE PROFANE

Profane - from “pro,” without “fanum,” temple.

Literally one “before,” or “outside the temple.” In the Masonic sense a “profane” is one who has not been initiated.

“No, I’m not a Mason. I’ve never been asked to join!”

How many times has this been said, usually with some indignation, in answer to the question, “Are you a Mason?”

It comes to some men with a shock of distinct surprise that Freemasonry asks no man to join her ranks. In this refusal to proselyte - nay, in the distant prohibition of any proselyting - Freemasonry, curiously enough, joins hands with Brahminism, the religion of much of the Orient, which has the distinction among religions of attempting to make no converts. In its refusal to seek membership, Freemasonry stand alone among organizations.

The reasons are dual: First, Freemasonry, greater than any man, no matter how important he may be, confers honor upon her initiates. She is never honored by any man seeking her mysteries. Second, it is an essential part of Freemasonry that a man come of “his own free will and accord.” The Fraternity obligates a candidate for all time.

“Once a Mason, always a Mason” is a truth, no matter how little interest the member may take, no matter if he demits, no matter if he be dropped N.P.D. or even expelled; he cannot “un-make” himself as a Mason, nor can he avoid moral responsibility for the obligations he has assumed.

Could any man say: “I joined under a misapprehension, I was over persuaded, I was argued into membership,” he might think himself possessed of just such a cause and a reason for a failure to live up to the obligations which no longer interest him. But no man does so join. He must declare in his petition, and around a dozen times during the course of his progress through the degrees, that his application is voluntary. Were any persuasion used upon him before he signed his petition, he could not truthfully state that his entry was “of his own free will and accord.”

This is pretty well grounded in most Freemasons. But sometimes it has the untoward effect of making a Mason Chary of giving legitimate information about the Fraternity, properly sought for a worthy purpose. It is highly improper to say to one’s friend “I wish you’d join my lodge, I’d like to see you enjoy the advantages of Freemasonry.” It is wholly legitimate to answer a serious question asked by some man who is considering making an application.

Some good brethren when asked questions about Masonry by the profane are puzzled as to just how much they may tell. Knowing well certain matters of which they must not speak, they are not always sure just where these end, and where begins that which may not be told. Much more

is tellable than is secret. Literally thousands and multiplied thousands of books have been written on and about the Ancient Craft; the Aporetta, or secrets of Freemasonry, could they be written at all, might be compressed within a few pages.

Let us suppose then, that we are asked by a sincere man: "Tell me something of Freemasonry. I think I would like to be a Freemason, but I know very little about it."

Such a query is the key which may legitimately unlock our lips about those outward matters concerning the Fraternity which all the world may know.

We may begin by assuring the questioner that Freemasonry brings as many duties and responsibilities as it does pleasures and rewards.

The Freemason becomes a link in a chain; he must be as strong as the next link or we want him not. He who looks to the Fraternity to provide all, give all, and receive nothing, should apply to some other organization.

It is legitimate to explain the structure of Freemasonry to a seriously interested questioner. Freemasons gather together in lodges; local organizations chartered by, and holding existence under the Grand Lodge of the State in which they live and are. A lodge comes into being when the Grand Master gives a dispensation to meet, U.D. (Under Dispensation); it becomes a "regular" lodge when its Charter is granted by the Grand Lodge.

It is no secret that a lodge has a Master, two Wardens, two Deacons, a Secretary and a Treasurer, etc. It is not, perhaps, necessary to go at length into the several duties of these officers, but it may be wise to explain the essential difference between a Worshipful Master of a Lodge, and the President or other presiding officer of secular bodies. A Master, once installed, may not be removed by his brethren, only by the Grand Master or the Grand Lodge. Within bounds he is all powerful in his Lodge; not the servant of his brethren, as is the presiding officer of a club, but literally the "Master," with power to control and limit debate, put or not put motions, open and close Lodge at his pleasure, call special meetings, and so on. All such matters are set forth in printed books and usually in the code or Ahiman Rezon of the Grand Lodge.

Lodges naturally and rightly attempt to guard their West Gates against the entry of men who desire only to receive Masonic charity. For this reason it is natural to look with especially careful eyes at the petition of the elderly man. When a man of mature years inquires regarding Freemasonry, we may well explain that while a Mason's Charity is as boundless as his ability, Freemasonry is not, per se, an eleemosynary institution. It does not exist primarily for charitable purposes, nor is charity its greatest work. In many Jurisdictions are Masonic Homes, Hospitals, Schools, Charity Foundations intended for unfortunate members of the Fraternity, their widows and orphans - sometimes their mothers and sisters. They are not designed for the relief of the poor who are not members of the Fraternity, and those unconnected to members by blood ties.

Therefore the man who desires to become a Mason that he may take advantage of its charity is turned back long before he reaches the West Gate. The more an applicant appears as if he may in

the future need help, the more carefully does the investigating committee work to discover the facts.

Totally misunderstanding the purpose and spirit of Freemasonry some men seek it for business advantages. Freemasons naturally frown upon such petitions. But scorn should not be meted out to an ignorant profane seeking knowledge. A man may be a good citizen, a good churchman, a good businessman and yet know nothing of Freemasonry.

If such a one, in the course of his inquiry regarding the Fraternity, exhibits an interest in the business advantages which may inure to him through membership in a lodge, it is legitimate to explain - courteously but with emphasis - that Freemasonry is not a Board of Trade, a Chamber of Commerce, a Luncheon or Commercial Club; and that it makes no effort to aid its members in commercial relations. The man who wants to become a Freemason because he thinks Freemasonry can help him can never be a good Mason. He who desires Freemasonry because he thinks he can help his fellows is already a Mason in his heart.

Other things being equal, Masons usually prefer to have business relations with their brethren, in the same way a man may prefer to buy footwear from his blood brother who is in the shoe business. But no one will pay his blood brother ten dollars a pair for shoes he can buy for half price from a non-relative!

It is unquestionable true, and may be stated to the serious inquirer, that Freemasonry does play a quiet and unostentatious part in the business lives of its members. But it should be emphasized that this is a by-product of mutual friendship and association, and the he who seeks Freemasonry for this alone will be bitterly disappointed. We all know of popular members of our lodge who win and keep the business of their brethren because of their likability. But we also know that this is not the result of any effort by the successful brother to win that which is freely given him. The brother who attempts to make his lodge association a feeder for his vocation is invariably hit by the boomerang of an aroused antipathy which hurts as much as he hoped to be helped.

All this may be explained to the inquirer. We may well quote a part of the Charge to an Entered Apprentice, as it is printed in most Jurisdictions: "If, in the circle of your acquaintance, you find a person desirous of being initiated into Masonry, be particularly attentive not to recommend him, unless you are convinced that he will conform to our rules, the honor, glory and reputation of the Fraternity may be firmly established, and the world at large convinced of its good effects."

Often a Mason is asked by a profane: "What does Masonry stand for? What does it do?"

It is much more difficult to explain to one without the mystic circle what Masonry "does," than what it is. What Masonry "stands for" should be easy for any Freemason to explain. We may inform the inquirer that the Fraternity "stands for" country, home and public school; for law and order; and decency; for honor, morality and religion; for brotherhood, relief and the inculcation of truth. Parts of our ritual are printed in books and in monitors. There is nothing secret about this; while we do not go about spouting non-secret ritual upon all occasions; there is no reason why we should not and many reasons why we should, to be able to point out by such quotations some of the principles of Masonry.

The essential matter is to give a true picture of the Fraternity to all who express a desire for it. Freemasonry is not a “secret society” - although it is often incorrectly so called - but a “society with secrets” which is quite another matter. In a “secret society” the membership, existence and whereabouts is a secret. Freemasonry’s membership, existence or whereabouts is no secret. Men proudly wear the emblems on their coats and watch chains. Many Grand Lodges publish lists of their members. Most Grand Lodges maintain card systems of all Masons in their Jurisdictions, so that it is possible to ascertain whether or not a certain John Smith is a Mason. Our Temples are proud buildings, well built, handsome monuments for all the world to see. Our printed Proceedings are to be had in every library. Newspapers carry notices of lodge matters, A flourishing Masonic Press carries news of the Craft far and wide. Obviously, we are not “secret” although we possess jealously guarded “secrets.”

Any profane has a natural right to know something about Masonry that he may decide whether it is an organization with which he wishes to associate. If we refrain from advertising our activities it is not because they are secret, but because they are private; not because they must not be told when there is a reason for telling them, but because we do not wish to persuade any man to our doors. We want him to come, if he comes at all, from an inherent desire, from having conceived a regard for the Fraternity, from his belief that he has something to offer Masonry and that Masonry has something to offer him.

Such a man naturally asks questions of Freemasons.

Once he has made inquiry, the door is opened and we may tell him much. Let us make sure that what we tell him is less, rather than more than the truth. Let us never soil our gentle Craft with horrid tales of goats and “buttings” of “backing down” and “third degree” tortures. Let us speak up like men and Masons and say roundly that there is nothing in Ancient Craft Masonry which is undignified, humorous, funny or playful; let us assure him with solemnity that our ceremonies are beautiful, impressive and instructive; and that behind and beyond the outward form of the degrees is a spiritual truth, a body of inner knowledge, an arena of wisdom which benefits any man who receives it, and in direct proportion to his ability to see behind the symbol to the reality.

Let us minimize the pleasures, and stress the duties when talking to a profane who wishes to learn of our lodges and their work. True, the “innocent mirth” of Freemasonry, to quote the “Old Charge,” is of interest and value to us all. Many a lodge is not only a center of union but a center of social intercourse in its home town. Its amusements and entertainments may be, and often are, of real value to the community. But a lodge does not exist merely to entertain and to amuse; in talking to the profane inquirer, let us lay less emphasis on the by-products of play, and draw his attention more to the serious and worthwhile sides of lodge life; charity, instruction, fellowship, mutual trust and dependence; religion without bias or doctrine - in other words, brotherhood.

So shall we give an intelligent and Masonic answer to an intelligent and Masonic question, and, perhaps, lay the foundation on which the bridge will be built over which a new initiate may walk from the North of darkness into the East of Masonic Light!