

FREEMASONRY'S NUTS AND BOLTS

This Short Talk Bulletin was written by Worshipful Brother Walter M. Callaway, Jr., Editor of The Masonic Messenger, official publication of the Grand Lodge of Georgia, in fulfillment of the requirements for admission into the Society of Blue Friars, an honorary association of Masonic writers. Brother Callaway read this essay at the 44th Annual Meeting of the Blue Friars in Washington, D. C., on February 26, 1975.

While Freemasonry is a beautiful system of morality, it has its fraternal machinery, made up of many component parts including nuts and bolts. From time to time the machinery requires inspection.

There are many Masonic mourners going about the streets today who are singing sad songs about the impending demise of our ancient Brotherhood. We are being warned that Freemasonry must adapt its philosophy and its ways to fit the times, that we must be relevant to the world today. Some claim that "in the interests of time" the ritual must be shortened to the point of emasculation; some of the lectures should be abolished because they are time-consuming. There are many who want to see the Masonic Grave side Rite eliminated because at times it causes conflict with certain clergymen. These are but a few of the lamentations being heard from those who do not seem to have time for the Craft and its ancient ways.

One of the most rewarding of Masonic assignments is that of Foreign Correspondent of one's Grand Lodge, or Chairman of the Fraternal Relations Committee, or by whatever style the job is denominated. In my own Grand Lodge of Georgia, the position is spelled out as a one-man Committee, Foreign Correspondent. One of the major duties of the office is to receive and review the *Proceedings* of all the other Grand Lodges in fraternal communications with one's own. This position affords a high vantage point from which the Correspondent is enabled to keep himself abreast of Masonic developments across the United States and in many foreign countries.

It has been my pleasure to have served my Grand Lodge as Foreign Correspondent for the past seven years. During that period I have been enabled to observe and to learn of Masonic affairs the world over. It is a delightful Masonic assignment for one who is interested and concerned.

According to our Masonic scholars, Freemasonry dates back for some six hundred years or more. It originated in operative form prior to the year 1390, when the Regius Manuscript was supposed to have been written, or copied, whichever the case may be. This means that for more than six centuries Freemasonry has waxed and waned in this world of ours. Sometimes it has reeled with a bloody head from the blows from church and state; in our own country Freemasonry was persecuted with merciless ferocity during the Morgan frenzy. But the Craft has outlived all its enemies, just as Truth will always outlive Error.

And what, we ask ourselves, has been the secret, the whys and wherefores, the reasons that have brought the principles of Freemasonry through all the vicissitudes of history during the six hundred years past? There have to be logical explanations.

Every man to his own opinion; may we never see the day dawn when freely expressed opinion is denied to any man! In my view Freemasonry has survived as a living force for good by its rigid adherence to the landmarks throughout the years; by compliance with the ancient customs and usages of the Craft; by recognition of the precept that it is not within the power of any man, or body of men, to make innovations in the body of Masonry. The system of Morality which we call Freemasonry is clothed in the habiliments of Truth, which is invulnerable to successful attack from without or within.

We have little to fear from attack by external enemies. Through centuries they have stormed our walls without success. I don't know of any internal enemies in the Craft who would deliberately seek to destroy us. But we do have those in our ranks who, with the best of intentions, would disrupt Freemasonry as we have known it and make innovations to the point of changing our Gentle Craft to something other than Freemasonry.

I speak of those who would permit solicitation of candidates; those who regard size of membership as the criterion of lodge successor failure. Since the Masonic "gold-rush" days of the late 1940's and early 1950's, when petitioners were coming from here, from there, from everywhere, and our Lodge and Grand Lodge officers, with some exceptions, became enamored of the sheer force of numbers of new members, there has been almost a mystique about the size of membership. One may read all the written material on the philosophy of Freemasonry ever printed without once finding that size of membership is a laudable goal of the Craft, or that a Lodge with one hundred members is necessarily a better Lodge than one with only fifty members. The energy expended by those who moan over our losses of membership would be put to better use if those mourners made an in-depth study of why we lose so many members we already have.

Why do so many permit themselves to be suspended for non-payment of dues? Why do so many members never return after they have been raised? Why do so many Entered Apprentices never return after that degree? Such an investigation, I think, could produce facts which might be embarrassing to the Lodge and its leadership.

If there is a heel of Achilles in the structure of Freemasonry, or in the practice of Freemasonry, I should say that it lies in the failure of the Lodge to hold the interest or to educate the newly raised candidate in the degrees of Freemasonry. From the time he is raised, he is given a few instructions on the floor of the Lodge and is then dismissed to the sidelines by the Master with a perfunctory parting shot, "Come back as often as you can. You'll get out of Freemasonry only what you put into it!"

Such a statement is not true and tends to mislead the new Brother into thinking that Freemasonry is a sort of tit-for-tat arrangement. The Master should inform the new member that he must stand his examination on the Master's catechism; then he should inform him that there exists out there a great wide world of Freemasonry and that he, the new Brother, should learn all he can about his

Fraternity, that he should participate in it, that he can profitably spend the rest of his life learning a little at a time something about the Craft and what it stands for, that it extends far beyond his Lodge, his state or his own country. He should be informed that the Ritual is a necessary means to an end and should not be regarded as the sum total of Masonic knowledge.

Such is the occasion when we have a golden opportunity to stimulate an unquenchable thirst for Masonic knowledge, something that should be imbued in all candidates for Freemasonry. It is my personal view that it is quite impossible for a man to advance in Masonic knowledge without at the same time becoming a better and more useful member of the craft. Can a citizen study the lives and times of our founding fathers without becoming a better patriot?

All this is not to say that it is to be expected that each Freemason who reads Masonic books will become a Masonic scholar. But at least he should read enough to know some of the basic facts of the origin and general philosophy of Freemasonry. He should learn to tell the difference between fiction and fact in Masonic literature.

To effectuate any improvement in any system of Masonic education, it is necessary that our communications be improved, member to member, lodge to lodge, Grand Lodge to Grand Lodge. With your permission, a personal point is made here. Your speaker was made a Master Mason in 1939, appointed to the west chair in 1940. Occupational difficulties incidental to World War II caused me to drop out of the "line" on two occasions. Finally I became Worshipful Master in 1953 and served my term through 1954. About five years later, a new secretary of the Lodge handed me a tract and said he thought I might be interested. It turned out to be a *Short Talk Bulletin* of the Masonic Service Association. In some twenty-one years as an active Freemason, this was the first time I had ever seen or heard of a *Short Talk Bulletin!*

In recent years it has been quite noticeable that serious efforts are now being made by Grand Lodges to inculcate more Masonic knowledge on the members and better proficiency on officers and ritualists. Most Grand Lodges seem to have adopted rather vigorous programs to improve such practices. It is all gratifying and encouraging. Nothing but time can tell the results, but we would point out that there can be no end to such activities. To be effective they must be continuing, generation after generation.

In my own Grand Lodge of Georgia there is now under way an aggressive program of Masonic education and Lodge Leadership. A Conference aimed at Wardens, but including other Lodge officers, is held at a center convenient to Lodge officers of North and Middle Georgia each November. Another is held in extreme South Georgia for the benefit of Wardens and others in that area. Emphasis is placed on leadership in the Lodges and these are held before annual Lodge elections in December.

To each newly raised Master Mason, the Grand Lodge presents copies of official publications: *The Lodge System of Masonic Education* is a 90-odd page booklet explaining the basic philosophy of the three degrees. *Masonic Etiquette* is a 58-page booklet explaining rules of behavior, decorum and the like. All through the year, meetings are held in specified areas of Georgia's 12 Masonic Districts, under the direction of the State Chairman of the Lodge Leadership Program, assisted by one of the four Area Directors. Educational type articles are

printed in our Grand Lodge monthly publication, *The Masonic Messenger*, which goes to all 96,000 members in Georgia.

Georgia, like so many other Jurisdictions, is making great efforts to catch up the long slack in Masonic education.

There are many component parts in the whole system, all of them important. But let us not forget the common nuts and bolts; they too are important.

Some Historical Events of October, 1775

Oct. 6: Continental Congress ordered the arrest of all dangerous Loyalists.

Oct. 7: British ships bombarded Bristol, R.I.

Oct. 10: Gen. Sir William Howe replaced Gage as British commander in Boston.

Oct. 13: Congress authorized a navy. Two ships were purchased and outfitted in November.

Oct. 18: A 350 man force of Canadians and Americans surrounded the fort at Chambly, Canada. British Major Stopford surrendered the fort, his 88 man garrison, as well as 169 others and large supplies of food and materiel.

Oct. 18: Falmouth (Portland), Maine, burned by British naval vessels in retaliation for Colonial "privateering." More than 400 buildings destroyed, and 15 ships destroyed or captured.

Oct. 19: A three-week Indian-Virginia conference at Pittsburgh was concluded. It delayed outbreak of frontier war for more than a year.

Oct. 24-25: Royal Navy ships bombarded Hampton, Va. A landing party was repulsed. Two vessels, forced aground, were captured by patriots.

Oct. 30: Congress authorizes two more ships and appoints a Naval Committee.