

MASONIC EXPECTATIONS

By S. Eugene Herritt, PM Cumberland Valley Lodge #315 Shippensburg, PA

As Short Talk Bulletins cross our desk to be reviewed for possible publication, every now and then one will be received that asks a penetrating question. that is the case with this particular Short Talk Bulletin entitled "Masonic Expectations" As you read the Short talk, please do so from a very personal point of view. Wherever the author says I, in your own mind think of yourself And as he refers to his friend "Sherry" think also about how many of us have had the same kind of experience with a brother who was kind enough to "take us under his wing." Every one of us has to sit down and think deeply about the two questions this Short Talk Bulletin asks! As you will note the two questions are simply: "What Did I Expect From Freemasonry?" and "what Did Freemasonry Expect From Me?" This Short Talk will help us, as we say to ourselves; "What is my response to these two questions?" --Editor

Impressions are interesting to evaluate and reevaluate, once in awhile, just to see if they are valid. The same is true of goals. It is imperative in life that we set goals for our selves, both in our personal and our professional life. It is equally imperative that we evaluate those goals periodically to see, not only if we have achieved them, but also to see if they are still worth the effort necessary to achieve them. That, then, is the basis for this Short Talk. After twenty years as a Master Mason I need to evaluate the value of being a Mason. Has Masonry met the expectations that I had for it when I was raised twenty years ago? Equally important in that evaluation is whether I have met the expectations that Masonry had of me twenty years ago.

So, I tried to evaluate two things. Does Freemasonry measure up and do I measure up to Freemasonry? My first experience with Masonry was when I was about nineteen years old. I became associated with an older gentleman who spoke to me about Masonry and piqued my interest in our fraternity. His name was Sherwood Griffith. we called him Sherry. He was a welder by trade and a Masonic advocate by belief. I only sat in Lodge with him one time, but his influence on my Masonic life has been profound. Sherry wasn't family but he was close enough to be and I only saw him at family functions. He traveled a great deal in his work and aside from his own family his conversation centered around his travels, both professional travels and Masonic Travels. His love of this fraternity was immense and he instilled in me an interest in Masonry.

He talked about the history of our organization, its role as an influential guidance to our historical leaders and its place in the spiritual development of all men who chose to be influenced in that positive manner. In regards to his attendance at Masonic meetings he spoke with open pleasure at being able to spend a wholesome night out with the boys. "Fellowship with men." he called it and his open and profound love of Masonry made me want to be a part of it. In reflecting on what my expectations were of Masonry twenty years ago I thought about Sherry. He gave me the basic drive to want to be a Mason. And just what did I expect? Very plainly, I expected only four things of this fraternity. I expected to enjoy wholesome fellowship with men.

I expected an historical education not readily available in the schools. I expected social opportunity by association with the type of men I anticipated to be members of the Lodge. And somewhat ashamedly, I expected professional opportunity. Sherry had told me how doors seemed to open up for him, in his profession, after he became a Mason, and quite frankly, I expected the same. I don't really know what Masonry expected of me, but I found out very fast as I received my degrees.

Masonry expected me to be a man of sound character and that I would improve if I took its lessons to heart and lived my life accordingly. Looking back over twenty years and evaluating the expectations I had, it is appropriate for me to determine whether or not Masonry has met my expectations. And in all honesty it has not! Masonry has so far exceeded those expectations that I would be doing our Fraternity a disservice to imply that it only met my expectations. In fact I am embarrassed to admit that I expected so little of being a Mason, I did not do our fraternity justice!

Let me explain my feelings here. You see, I was impressed immediately with the historical nature of our fraternity and the unique perspective that Masonry brings to the history and development of man. I wanted to know more. That need to know was reinforced by the fact that the men giving me my degree know it. They had memorized it and rehearsed it and wanted to make an impression on me about the importance of what they were saying. They did make an impression. I wanted to be able to give a degree with the same skill and elocution that they did. From the time I heard those degrees I wanted to go through the chairs. I wanted to speak to this body with the same confidence and skill that they did. It was at that point that I began to see the relationship between my Masonic expectations and Masonic reality.

The reality is that you can learn a lot of history by being a Mason but you have to attend meetings and do some studying and talk to some Masonic historians. Its like anything else in life. You get out of it what you put in. My job doesn't allow me to put as much time in as I would like, but when the effort is there the rewards are beyond all expectations! Reality is that a Lodge meeting is definitely fellowship with men, but the key is what my friend Sherry told me to expect--wholesome fellowship with men. A night away from your family perhaps, but in pursuit of something worthwhile and something your family can be proud of you for pursuing. There is value in a wholesome evening with men who share your desire to see good in the world. These evenings in their company give me hope that the world is not as bleak as the news reports tell us. I find refuge in our belief in God and in good. Masonry did that for me and it can do the same for any man. I expected social opportunity, and the reality is that I did experience an opportunity to expand my social contacts. But I have experienced more than that. I have made some very good friends. More importantly, I have seen what "good friends are willing to do for one another.

I am reminded that social contacts are meaning-less. They don't turn into friendships because of your Masonic affiliation. That happens only if you truly share a belief in the lessons of this fraternity. Masonry, and watching good Masons help one another, has shown me the value of human companionship. Masonry did that for me and it can do the same for any man. Probably the greatest conflict between my Masonic expectations and Masonic reality occurred with my expectation of professional opportunity. I believe a lot of non-Masons have that expectation. The reality is that a man progresses in life based on his adherence to a strong work ethic and his

talent to do his job well to the benefit of his employer. That holds true if you work for yourself, another human being, the government, or serve in the private sector.

It is possible for a man to be considered for advancement because another man knows him to be a Mason. But if his work doesn't measure up, or if he proves to be less a Mason than first believed, his advancement will not last. Good Masons won't let incompetent men advance at the expense of their own reputations or that of their fraternity. This fraternity does not teach favoritism, and we should not condone it. Masonry doesn't promise advancement. It offers opportunity for improvement, but the burden to improve is on each of us. Masonry taught me that and it can do the same for any man. There is perhaps another reality about our fraternity that comes to mind. Masonry is not perfection and being a Mason does not make any man perfect. We have made some mistakes in who we have let into our fraternity and in some who we have kept out. We have all met Masons whose behavior was a source of embarrassment to us.

We were not embarrassed by our fraternity but rather by our association with that individual. The point is, however, we judge people like that, not on their station in life, not on their employment status, but on how they conduct themselves in the eyes of the world and in the presence of their fellow man. For those who believe the lessons taught in this fraternity we come to know, what I think, my friend Sherry really was trying to express: there is a sense of acceptance for what we are--good men trying to be better, trying to make the world better, and trying to help one another. Has Masonry met my expectations? No, because it has surpassed everything I ever expected our fraternity to be. Have I met Masonry's expectations of me? I don't know. I know I try to be worthy of being a Mason. I try to be a good man. I also know I fail sometimes and that bothers me. But I try again. Life and learning taught me always to try again. Masonry's lessons have helped me to focus on those things in life worth trying to achieve. Faith in God, love of family and a desire to do better. Have I met Masonry's expectations of me? I don't know. You are Masonry and that is your judgment.