

MASONRY AND PUBLICITY

How much may Masonry use the modern idea of publicity without injury to the Ancient Craft?

By "Publicity" is meant that advertising which reaches both the Mason and the non-Mason. Masonic news or information in Masonic Journals, books and pamphlets is not "publicity" within the meaning of the word here used.

Masonic Lodges do not usually parade, or join with other bodies in civic celebrations. Individual Masons do, but seldom as a lodge, except when laying Corner Stones of Public Buildings, or at Funerals. In both of these ceremonies, the Masonic Lodge, or the Grand Lodge is preeminent.

No criticism of a Grand Master or a Grand Lodge is here intended, when it is stated that as a general rule most of them hold that Freemasonry, being greater than any man or body of men, should not lend itself to play tail to any kite. Circumstances alter cases.

When Grand Masters have approved the taking of minor parts in some civic demonstration by a Lodge or Grand Lodge, their reasons were doubtless excellent. As a rule, however, Grand Masters and Grand Lodges believe it belittling for the oldest fraternal organization in the world to occupy a subordinate place in any public exercises. In laying Corner Stones, the Grand Lodge is either in charge, or it does not take any part. The Grand Master (or the officer who represents him) lays the Corner Stone, or the Corner Stone is not laid Masonically. Other organizations may join in a corner stone laying, be present as spectators, and add the weight of their importance to the occasion, but the Grand Lodge conducts the ceremonies.

In a Masonic Funeral, the lodge takes charge of the remains after all other ceremonies are completed and keeps charge until the body is committed to the dust. The lodge is last, most important, preeminent. If Freemasonry is to conduct a funeral, she demands that no claim on the departed body be considered greater than her own; not the Grand Army, Loyal Legion, other Masonic Bodies such as the Chapter, Commandry, Council or Consistory is to come before the Blue Lodge. All may hold their services before the lodge takes charge, and as many after the body is in the grave as they wish. But, after the body is placed in the loving hands of the sorrowing Brethren, none may dispute with them the right to lay away in the clay the remains of him who was a brother of the ancient Craft. Membership in other organizations, the claims of the church, the friendships of associates cannot come before the Blue Lodge. If others insist on preeminence, then, with regret but finality, the Blue Lodge withdraws from any participation.

These matters are cited here at some length, are as foundation stones on which the opponents of too much publicity base their arguments.

There has grown up in this country, through the years, and with the increase of publicity methods, an idea that the Masonic Lodge, like other organizations, would find that "it pays to advertise." In many Saturday evening and Sunday newspapers can be found a "Fraternal

Column" in which may be found "news" of the ancient Craft. It is not unheard-of to find a brother appointed in a lodge as a "newspaper correspondent" or "publicity director," whose business it is to get "news" of the doings of his lodge in the newspaper! Those who believe that nothing makes more potency for the prestige and influence of Freemasonry among men than her deserved reputation for quiet, retiring, unselfseeking and secret devotion to her ideals, think that "advertising" can be carried to extremes, when it does the ancient Craft far more harm than good.

The genesis of the movement is east to understand. In these busy, hurrying days, with a thousand things to take time and attention, "getting out the crowd" is a problem for any Master. The larger the city, the harder the task. The smaller lodge in the smaller center suffers to some extent from the competition of the radio, moving pictures, automobile, golf club, theater, lecture room, library, amusement park; but not as much as the lodge in the big city which adds to all these a dozen clubs, other organizations, pressure of business, social engagements and entertainment of all kinds.

To publish in the Sunday newspaper that "Hiram Lodge will work the Third, or Master Mason Degree on a full class on next Tuesday evening, with Worshipful Master James Jones in the East and Senior Deacon William Smith delivering the Historical Lecture, followed by entertainment and refreshments," is considered in many Jurisdictions only a matter of commonplace form and not subject to criticism. And yet, what a great change from a hundred or a hundred and fifty years ago. then, only such matters Masonic got in the news; a funeral procession, a corner stone laying. It was considered then - and is considered now by many - that the power of Freemasonry is over men's "Hearts," not their minds, pocket books, attendance or interest in being amused. In other words, many think the "crowd" obtained for an evening by advertising is of no real benefit to the lodge, and the "work" of no real benefit to those who come merely for the "refreshment and enter-tainment."

This is A.L. 5929; in many ways Masonry has kept up, and in some others she must also keep up with the times. We no longer meet "on hills or in vales" but in handsome Temples. We use electricity for the Lesser Lights and have a ventilation system to take out the vitiated air. What a modern city lodge pays in just rent for a year would have run George Washington's Mother Lodge for the same period; rent, charity and other expenses of all other kinds included. In the older days, notice of the lodge meeting was sent around by word of mouth; quietly and secretly. Our Masonic forefathers were a hand- picked body of men and they guarded themselves as such from profane curiosity. Perhaps, too, many a good man was intrigued to petition them who would have scoffed at the idea, had everyone known of Masonic activities and when they were held. Certainly the personnel of the lodges of a hundred; two hundred years ago were a cross-section of the best there was in the land.

Today we live at a faster pace. It is now generally agreed that a mere notice of a lodge meeting in the daily paper, if beyond the imagination of our ancient brethren, is not necessarily un-Masonic or improper unless so held by the Grand Master. But a notice is one thing; an account of what has happened, with names, dates, places, even a verbatim report of a speech is something else again. Well meaning brethren, with the best intentions in the world, like to see the name of their lodge and an account of her meetings in print; forgetting that Masonry is neither the Rotary, Kiwanis, Chamber of Commerce or the Board of Trade.

The Freemasonry of an older day was sufficient unto itself; extremely careful as our ancient brethren were as to the men they made brethren, its lodges may even have been more imbued with serious purpose than today. Entertainment was sufficiently provided in the traditional banquet and the "innocent mirth" of the Old Charges. Today some men come into the Fraternity with the idea, mistaken but strong, that a lodge is but "another organization" and as such should provide picnics, ladies nights, excursions, theatricals and what have you. We have "Masonic" Glee Clubs and "Masonic" Bowling Teams, "Masonic" Dramatic Associations and "Masonic" Debating Societies. Admitting that these are but an expression of the times, and in themselves elements for good, it is also true that they do lead to the same practice of publicity which attends similar organizations which have no "Masonic" as a qualifying label before their names. Many lodges - perhaps most lodges - publish a monthly Trestleboard, or lodge notice. It is Masonic law in some Jurisdictions that the name and address of applicants for the degrees shall be sent to the entire membership, and that the candidates for any degree shall be made known to all the brethren prior to the degree.

This too, may be a necessity of A.L. 5929, but the practice of sending such notices out under one-cent postage, or by postal card is wholly indefensible. In some Jurisdictions it is forbidden by Grand Lodge regulation; it is considered that those who are candidates either for election or for degrees have the right of privacy and that it is no part of Masonic duty to advertise the facts to the profane. There is much discussion, pro and con, as to what may and what may not be put in print regarding our ceremonies, our ritual or our organization. In ancient days nothing was printed which could possibly be considered of esoteric nature. Then came Webb and the Monitor; followed by many a student of Freemasonry to write many a book. Now it is generally conceded that the "secrets" of Freemasonry are not divulged in the printed Monitor, or in any Masonic Book which deals with the history, symbolism, jurisprudence; or ethics and ideals of the Craft. We say "generally considered" - some "bitter enders" resent anything printed about Freemasonry, thinking that if it be set down in ink that a Master may wear a silk hat, or that the Lesser Lights are grouped around the Altar, some one has violated an obligation, in spite of the fact that any charwoman may, and does see the interior of a lodge room and any Masonic supply house pictures and gives prices of "Master's Silk Hats."

Such a view point is the other extreme. Just where the lodge shall steer as between the Scylla of too much and the Charybdis of too little publicity is for the individual lodge to decide. But Grand Lodges themselves are often in a fog of uncertainty; they have no time to take up every piece of Masonic publicity and make of it a bone of contention in a Grand Lodge meeting. Much, if not all, of the responsibility for a due regard for Masonic retiringness, not to say secrecy, must rest in the hands of the individual Master and Secretary.

In fairness it must be admitted that a certain amount of Masonic publicity, both in newspapers and otherwise, has many reasons in its favor. Masters desire a large attendance at meetings. To advertise some special feature of a meeting is to insure that more brethren will be interested and come. The postal card reminding of a lodge meeting, is far easier and cheaper than a letter. The "reading notice" in the local papers attracts the attention of wives, daughters, sisters, and mothers who are quick to tell the bother, husband or son; "Don't forget to go to Acacia Lodge tonight!" Many good brethren argue "Freemasonry needs good men. In this day and age, the quiet, retiring,

little-known organization attracts no attention. Freemasonry must be made known to the general public, that non-Masons may be attracted to the organization and apply for membership."

But beneath all arguments, pro and con, lies a fact too often lost sight of: Freemasonry is a power in the world because of her reputation. What is the reputation? Silence, secrecy, lack of self-seeking, good works, mystery. These are the factors which lead serious and thoughtful men to ask themselves: "Should I not apply to an organization which does good in secret, which asks nothing for itself, which does not seek?"