

MASONRY'S IMPORTANT INGREDIENT - THE INDIVIDUAL

MORE LIGHT in MASONRY (IX) MASONRY'S IMPORTANT INGREDIENT - THE INDIVIDUAL by Allen E. Roberts

Freemasonry in the United States counts almost four million individuals in its membership. The word individual is all important. In Masonry the individual controls his own destiny. He is a free man.

The man who enters a Masonic Lodge is free to become a good, or indifferent member. He can attend meetings, if he wants to. He's not penalized if he doesn't. He isn't rewarded with stars or bars for perfect attendance. He receives no awards for performing particular duties. He may work a lifetime for Freemasonry and receive no special recognition. His counterpart in a civic club would probably have his name prominently displayed in the news media constantly.

Then why do so many Freemasons devote so much of their lives to the Order? Actually, there is no obvious answer. It's impossible to generalize. There is probably no one answer that can fit even a dozen individuals.

Let's look at the case of one Brother whom I know intimately.

Twenty-five years ago he said to a friend while at church one Sunday, "I've always wanted to be a Mason, but evidently you Masons don't like me."

"Why do you say that?" asked his friend.

"Because none of you has ever asked me to join." His friend laughed and told him no one ever would, but he would take care of that right now. A petition was in his hands before the day was over. He filled it out. It was signed by two of his Masonic friends and submitted to the Lodge.

Before the petition could be acted on, the petitioner's wife had a miscarriage. He had no hospital insurance; his savings were tied up in a new business he had just started. His friend called and offered to have the petition held over till things were better. The petitioner said he appreciated that, but he didn't want that done. He and his wife had talked it over. They had reserved one last Savings Bond so he could become a Mason. That's the way they wanted it.

He was elected to receive the three degrees, which were conferred on him promptly. He learned the Master Mason's catechism. Then he learned all the lectures. He received all the instruction in the ritual he wanted. But the Lodge had no library. When he asked where he could obtain books about Masonry, no one could tell him.

Some time later he learned about the Masonic Service Association. He wrote to it and his Masonic education began. A few years later he attended a "Masonic Church Service" with members of his Lodge. The minister was an old man, and evidently a dedicated Master Mason. He told of many episodes of Brotherly Love in action, particularly during the Civil War. His heart was filled with pride to know that he was a member of an organization that in spite of the hells of war would help a Brother in distress.

In the weeks that followed he couldn't forget that preacher and his stories about Freemasons. Search as he did, he could find no one who knew what Freemasonry was all about. He determined to do what little he could to change this - to work in the field of Masonic education.

About this time a Past Grand Master learned of his interest and took him by the hand. They learned and worked together to develop an educational program. They made a lot of mistakes. They made some friends, some enemies, and many dedicated Master Masons. They are still working and won't be satisfied until every man who enters a Masonic Lodge has the opportunity to learn what Masonry really is.

This series of Short Talk Bulletins is an endeavor to further their aim - to make every member a dedicated Master Mason. It can't be done, as we've said before, without Constructive Leadership. If the leaders don't care, the member won't either. This series has tried to prove that Leaders do care.

Who are the leaders? Every individual who becomes a Freemason is now a leader, or at least a potential leader. So, every member should learn the Masonic ritual. But above all, he should learn the meaning behind the ritual. He should become Masonically educated so that he will become Masonically dedicated.

Every Masonic Lodge is a Team. In the Constructive Lodge the Worshipful Master assigns a coach to see that the Team functions properly. As in football, each member has an assignment. When he carries out his assignment fully, goals are reached without difficulty. In this series, we've laid down some ground rules to follow. But we can't emphasize too strongly that every Lodge is different. Every Lodge will have to establish its own format to achieve success. We have merely pointed the way.

Where the Team doesn't function, the individual is of necessity on his own. It will be more difficult for him to learn what he ought to know about Freemasonry, but he can do it. He can prove that he is a leader. He should remember that there are ways to achieve success as an individual. Not all games require teamwork. Tennis and chess champions come from individuals who have had to strive alone. But the help they need is always available somewhere.

For the individual who wants a self-study course in Freemasonry, there are many good Masonic books available. Last month's Short Talk listed some and told where to find hundreds of others. As an example, here are a few that can give anyone interested an immediate well-rounded background in Masonry:

Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia, available from Macoy Publishing Company, is an excellent one-volume history of Freemasonry. Among its many features is a "History Reading Directory". By following this outline, the student of the Craft can obtain a well-rounded background. Mackey's Revised Encyclopedia of Freemasonry is still a valuable tool for finding answers to particular questions about the Craft. In these two books the student of Masonry can find most of the Masonic knowledge he needs to know.

Carl Claudy's Introduction to Freemasonry is available from The Temple Publishers, 8120 Fenton Street, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910. It's an easy to read explanation of the three degrees of Freemasonry. It covers the symbolism and history of the Craft that the Master Mason ought to know. Although it was written in 1931, it is as up-to-date as tomorrow.

For the Master Mason who wants to become a leader in his Lodge, Key to Freemasonry's Growth will help. It is available from Macoy. Its pages contain the "meat" from hundreds of books on management written for industry. It has been adapted for the fraternal leader. It is being used as a text by Grand Lodges, district conferences, Lodges, individuals, and even by some military and government agencies. One reviewer asserted: "It is a must reading for the peanut vendor, the heads of large corporations, as well as the line officers of Masonic Lodges."

These four books can serve as starters for the individual, or group, who wants a self-study course in Freemasonry. In addition, there are hundreds of other books, pamphlets, and brochures available. The Masonic Service Association has been in the "business" of Masonic education since 1919. It wants to be of service to all Freemasons. Let it know what you want.

As pointed out in the November Short Talk, Grand Lodge libraries are available to all who are interested. Grand Lodge educational committees have material pertinent to their Jurisdictions. They want to get this material into the hands of every member.

Every Master Mason has promised "to improve myself in Masonry." This is an individual commitment which every member ought to take seriously. You didn't say you would improve yourself in Masonry only if the leadership was interested. Or if someone took you by the hand and led you along a thornless path. Or if everything was made easily obtainable. What you promised was "to improve myself in Masonry."

When a man is raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason, he has become a member of the world's greatest fraternal organization. What he does from that day on strengthens or weakens the Fraternity. If he is a good Mason, he enhances the name of Masonry in his community. His actions make other good men want to emulate him. He becomes a stronger citizen, a better churchman.

Being made a Master Mason, a member of a Lodge, doesn't automatically make a man a good Freemason. Like the high school or college graduate, he still has much to learn. He has really received only enough knowledge to "get by". If he doesn't put this knowledge to work to acquire more knowledge, he has wasted his time and his money. He won't satisfy his ego needs.

While there is disagreement in determining just what man's needs are, most behavioral scientists agree that there are three kinds: (1) Physical and security needs, such as food, shelter, and clothing; (2) Social needs, because all human beings are dependent on each other and must help or be helped to realize self-satisfaction; (3) Ego needs, resulting from man's desire to be an individual, to do things on his own, to realize a sense of self-accomplishment.

Every man who enters Freemasonry has satisfied his physical and security needs. He has become a Mason because he must satisfy his social and egoistical needs. In Masonry every individual has an unlimited area in which to work to realize these needs. This is good, because it has been determined that a man utilizes only from 10 to 20 percent of his natural creative ability in the work that satisfies his security needs-his daily job.

Of course, there are men who desire no responsibility. Many would rather spend their time building model ships or planes. There are others to whom money is "king" and acquiring it is a compulsive activity. But the vast majority believe in the American dream that every man can rise to the highest position in his organization, his company, or the land if he works to achieve worthwhile social and spiritual goals.

Human relationships thrive on a balance of giving and taking. This is particularly true in Freemasonry. The better the balance is, the more the relationship will flourish and grow. This will help to fulfill the needs we all have.

Apart from the material things, we all need recognition, approval, encouragement, affection, understanding, sympathy, and especially acceptance of our weaknesses. These are the ingredients of the "mystic tie". Those who are strong should willingly help the weak. Those who have knowledge to impart should not hesitate to teach those who need it.

We will do this, and more, if we will follow these words of wisdom from Bits & Pieces: "The man who does only what is required of him is a slave. The moment he does more, he's a free man."

Elsewhere I have given Masonic expression to this thought as follows:

"You have entered a new world. Symbolically, and perhaps literally, you have been reborn. This started the moment you were prepared to become a Freemason.

"As you progress in Masonic knowledge, your wisdom will broaden; you will become more vitally alive than ever before; you will become more aware of your fellowman, your family, your church, and your country. Your whole philosophy of life will improve.

"This will take place, but only if you become Masonically educated."

The last statement is most important. To become Masonically educated you will have to do more than is required of you. As you do this you will achieve a self-satisfaction that cannot be measured. And you will be proving that you have the qualities that are necessary for a leader.

Too often we are told, and unfortunately believe, that an individual can do nothing. Individuals have ideas. It is from ideas that countries and organizations grow. They grow, that is, if the ideas are brought out into the open and discussed, then put to work.

Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Edison, and Henry Ford, three individuals we have discussed earlier, had ideas, or used those discarded by others. Their accomplishments have been well documented in the pages of history. So are the deeds of countless other individuals who put their ideas to work and went on to become the leaders of their day.

Many, many individuals have influenced Freemasonry through their ideas. It is impossible in these pages just to name them all, without even mentioning their accomplishments. George Oliver wrote a Dictionary of Symbolical Masonry and dozens of other books and tracts on Freemasonry. Much of what he wrote has been discredited, but he did inspire others to add to or subtract from what he wrote. One so inspired was Robert Macoy, who published A General History, Cyclopedia, and Dictionary of Freemasonry. In 1849 he formed what is now the Macoy Publishing & Masonic Supply Company, Inc., practically the only publisher of Masonic books in the United States today.

Albert G. Mackey gave up his practice as a medical doctor to write about and for Freemasonry. He is most famous for his Encyclopedia of Freemasonry, written in 1874. It was he who compiled the 25 Landmarks which have influenced the Masonic law of several Grand Lodges in the United States. It was he who conferred the Scottish Rite degrees on Albert Pike, and it was Pike who revitalized the Scottish Rite by revamping the rituals of that Masonic Order.

Thomas Smith Webb (1771-1819) was the foremost ritualist of his day. He is credited with being the founder of the American, or York, Rite of Freemasonry. What he did with the ritual has influenced almost every Grand Lodge to this day. He inspired Jeremy Ladd Cross and John Barney to carry on as ritualists and organizers where he left off.

In this century there have been individuals such as Frank S. Land, who organized the Order of DeMolay for young men; George L. Schoonover, who is credited with founding The Masonic Service Association, which has helped to harmonize American Freemasonry. Out of its annual meetings came the Conferences of Grand Masters and Grand Secretaries. Through the Association American Freemasonry was able to unite in service to our soldier sons and Brothers during World War II, and frequently during periods of calamity to help, aid, and assist distressed worthy Brothers.

No well informed Freemason needs to be reminded of the contributions made by Joseph Fort Newton, D.D., whose book, The Builders, is still the best selling Masonic book in our country. The spiritual philosophy in his writings will influence countless generations of Freemasons to become better than they might otherwise be. One of the many Newton influenced was Carl H. Claudy, whose imaginative writings have inspired thousands of Craftsmen, and who brought The Masonic Service Association from infant weakness to the strength it enjoys today.

What can one individual do? Nothing - or everything! It all depends upon what the individual wants to do. But there is one thing certain - he can accomplish nothing by sitting on his hands. He will achieve nothing by burying his ideas. If he fears criticism, he will get nowhere.

"He that will so demean himself as not to be endeavoring to add to the common stock of knowledge and understanding, may be deemed a drone in the hive of nature, a useless member of society."

Whether or not an individual aspires to leadership, he can achieve most of the goals he sets for himself. But he first has to set those goals. If he does, he will be well on the road to success.

The man who sets goals for himself will utilize the principles of leadership that have been discussed in this series. He will use the planning process to reach his goals; he will organize himself and those around him to make his plans work; his "staff" will include those with the knowledge necessary to help him toward his objectives; he will know how to communicate his ideas and listen for the feedback essential to his success; he will practice participative control and take the corrective action needed every step of the way.

How important is the individual? Only the most important ingredient in Freemasonry!