

MY SON

Among the most tender relationships in all Freemasonry is that between father and son, when both are brethren of the Ancient Craft. But because the bond of fraternity, doubled, trebled by the blood tie, is so transcendental so also is it at times productive of mental stress and difficulty.

"My son has never said he would like to be a Freemason, although of course he knows of my membership and my interest. Shall I suggest that he join! How far may I go - how far should I go?"

Many a father is faced with this problem and the answers are as many as the situations. Nor can any Bulletin answer this troubled brother, for circumstances alter cases and what may be wise in one situation may be unwise in another.

Yet some observations may be ventured.

The unwritten law against proselyting is primarily to insure the truthful living of Masonic ideals, and for the protection of the Fraternity. To be a good Freemason a man must seek of his own free will and accord." If he is sought, he is deprived of the precious power of self-decision in a matter of great importance. Masons who are asked into the Fraternity seldom value it as those who have desired it of their own motion, and therefore, may not be as good Freemasons as those who petitioned, unasked.

But the relation of father and son is totally different from that of any other two men, one a Mason, the other not. The father has guided his son through childhood and youth. The father has offered counsel on many important matters; friends, choice of school, advantages of one business or profession over another. He has sought to help his son make a wise and a right choice in many, if not all phases of human intercourse. To translate the unwritten law against soliciting members to mean that a father should not advise with his son about a major interest in life which the father has found valuable and dear, is to be extremely technical.

But there is a vast difference between advice and solicitation. To say to a beloved son on his twenty-first birthday: "I have found Freemasonry of great value. It has promoted friendships in my life. It has provided me with a satisfactory philosophy of living. It has given me an interest in my fellowmen. It has afforded an outlet for altruism and given opportunities for unselfish labors for others. I suggest that you investigate it for yourself, and consider it seriously as one of the privileges of man's estate," is quite different from asking him: "My son, I want you to join my Lodge. Father knows best, and this is one of the things you are now in a position to do it, if for no other reason than to please me."

The first statement is one which a father might make to his son on any important activity - such as church or school. In it the father makes no attempt to force his son; nor does he ask for a

petition to any especial Lodge. In the second he has substituted his own judgment for that of his son, and asked as a personal favor something which should never be so considered.

It is not uncommon for a loving father to put a petition for the degrees in his own Lodge, together with the fees, at his son's plate at breakfast on his twenty-first birthday. And none who know the hearts of fathers can question the loving kindness of such a gift. But it is a matter for careful thought; in trying to be kind, may the father perhaps succeed only in being unconsciously cruel? Suppose the young man has already mentally selected another Lodge than his father's? Suppose he has already made up his mind that he does not want to be a Freemason? Suppose he has never thought of it at all, and now sends in his petition just because father, in effect, asks him to? In any such events, the young man is not likely to be happy as a Freemason in his father's Lodge. Here, also, circumstances alter cases; the petition and fee may be the most welcome of gifts, but at least the idea bears thinking through before action is taken.

"My son has said he wants to be a Freemason. Shall I ask him to petition my Lodge, or suggest that he choose for himself!"

In a great many places there is but one Lodge which the son can petition - his father's Lodge. In small communities with only one Lodge holding jurisdiction, the above question would not be asked. But in communities with two or more Lodges holding concurrent jurisdiction over candidates, the matter may be one of some importance. In large cities with many Lodges it may be of overwhelming importance.

For "the old Lodge" that is Mother Lodge to a father, may be anything but the type of Lodge which the young man desires. He may - and undoubtedly will - want to go into that Lodge in which he has the most friends. He may not want to be known only as "the son of the old man" but to make his own place for himself. Father's Lodge may be composed mostly of middle-aged or elderly men; a young man may build a far happier career in a Lodge largely of men nearer his own age. Father's Lodge may be a more expensive Lodge than son would like to join. But father's Lodge is the Lodge father loves, and unless the father make it easy for him to choose his own, a dutiful son is more than apt to choose the Lodge of his parent. It may be the happiest of choices: it may be less fortunate than another. The point here made is that he is the wise father who makes it possible for son to make his own choice (if choice there be) as to that Masonic home in which he will, normally, live his whole Masonic life, long after father has been gathered to his forbears.

"One of my happiest experiences was seeing my son raised as a Master Mason in my Lodge. But he now takes little interest, misses many meetings and is inclined to take his dimit and drop out altogether."

Alas, there is little or nothing that can be done. The damage is probably irreparable. But much might have been done to prevent such a feeling.

Why does the son of a father, raised in his father's Lodge, take little interest?

No categorical answer is possible. But some answers are probable.

Father may have been unwise enough to remember too often that this newly made brother was the little boy he saw through all childhood ills from measles to algebra. This small boy is not really Brother Smith - he's only little Tommy, immature, inexperienced, a mere kid! And so father contradicts him on the Lodge floor, won't let him take his normal part in Lodge activities, insists on sitting beside him at every meeting, prevents him from making his own friends. It is not to be wondered at that young Brother Smith, under such circumstances, "loses interest."

A certain father of a very positive nature, combative and virile, a power in his Lodge, and a leader in all his circles, refused to take his son's petition to his own Lodge. "Apply elsewhere!" he told the young man. In my Lodge you'll be just Daddy's son. You'll never be anything but Dad Jones' boy. Go where you can be Brother Bill Jones with no father to hamstring your career. Carve your own, Visit my Lodge and I'll visit yours, but you'll be the happier standing on your own feet than on mine."

An unusual father, but a sensible one.

Occasionally it happens that the reverse is the case. Father may be shy, retiring, gentle; the kind who never gets on his feet, who has never held office, who loves his Lodge from a seat in the second row. Son comes into Masonry all keyed up over joining his father's Lodge. Father has always talked about it at home and the general impression son has received is that father is a power in the Lodge; that the Lodge really couldn't get along without father. Then comes disillusionment. He finds that father plays but a small part. He is resentful that father isn't on a committee (regardless of the fact that father has doubtless refused a dozen committee assignments!) that no one asks father's advice, that father just sits in Lodge and takes no part. The young man, disappointed, loses interest. Nothing can be done about it now; much might have been done if father had given a more truthful impression before the young man joined.

And once in a while an impossible situation is created by a too proud father who tries to force his son forward too fast. Father is very proud of his Lodge. To have son in line, and eventually Master, would be a matter of much pride. He is continually prodding son to do more, speak more often, make suggestions, get known. He wearies officers with importunities to get son on this committee, do that piece of work. He bothers those with the present or future appointing power, trying to get a pledge of the appointment of son to the line. Gradually the Lodge gets the idea that if young Brown is appointed in line, it will be Brown Senior who will be the officer, with Brown Junior a mere voice for the old man. Result, Brown junior gets the cold shoulder and - loses interest.

He is the wise father who permits son to live his own life in Lodge, without any help or hindrance from his elder brother who is also Dad!

No father who has had the uplifting spiritual experience of raising his son to the Sublime Degree but cherishes it in his heart. But there are many to whom the raising of a son means much who do not know just how valuable such an experience may be-and so they do not give a thought to the possibility that they may play the Master's part in a third degree in which the son is to be the candidate.

"I never put on a degree in my life - I'm not a Past Master - I couldn't learn the work - the Master wouldn't let me

In a majority of American Grand jurisdictions the Master may put any qualified brother in the East to confer a degree, or any part of it. In a few, only Masters, Masters and Wardens or Past Masters may do any of the work. In the latter, of course, a father may not raise his son unless he has present or past Masonic office. But in most jurisdictions a father may raise his son, if he will learn his part and convince a Master that he knows it. Indeed, in these jurisdictions, Masters are usually eager to have fathers raise their sons, knowing what tender sentiments cling about the ceremony and sensing that the brethren enjoy seeing and hearing it.

It involves some labor. But it is labor well invested and the happy memories thus produced can be evoked at will by both father and son during the father's life, by son through many subsequent years. There is no more certain way to make sure that a young candidate will value that which his father values than to give the obligation with the voice which the son has learned to revere.

Occasionally a Master, a Past Master, or a Grand Master has opportunity to give his son the work; here, indeed is the full flower of that Masonic sentiment which adds to fatherhood and sonship the brotherhood of the Masonic Lodge. For when father not only raises his son but is in the East during the whole degree, then indeed is an ineradicable impression made on the newly-raised brother.

Once in a long while a Past Master requests the privilege of conferring all three degrees on his son. It is at least open to discussion whether this feat of memory does not frustrate the very end it is desired to attain. If Worshipful Brother Jones confers the first, and Senior Warden Brown the second degree, and then the candidate hears his own father's voice in the third degree, will he not be the more impressed than if it is the same voice in all three degrees'

It is not a matter any one can settle, except the father and the son involved. But it bears thinking through by the father ambitious enough, and ritualist enough, to contemplate putting on all three ceremonies.

"Should I instruct my son in Masonry between his degrees? Or should I leave hint to others?"

Again, a question each must settle for himself. But on the principle that a physician is usually less competent with his own family than a stranger, because of his intense personal interest, it may easily be argued that a son will receive instruction more patiently and learn the better from another than from his father. It is undeniable that the more men of mature years the young man finds interested in Masonry, and in him, the more apt is his opinion of the Fraternity to soar to greater heights. Yet circumstances may dictate the contrary - the instance is recalled of a young man who stuttered badly. With his father he spoke naturally, easily; with strangers haltingly. For any one else to have attempted the instruction, or to have conducted the examination in open Lodge, would have been tragic. But as a general rule son learns more easily and quickly from another than his father.

Finally, let it be said; there is much in Freemasonry, that crawls into a man's heart and nestles there - much that he will not admit to any but himself and his God. It is the great strength of the Fraternity that she creates such sentiments and holds so many hearts in a bond too strong for breaking, too tender for telling. No part of that bond is greater, tighter or tenderer than those strands which unite in brotherhood a father and a son. It is something to look forward to - it is something to exult in having - it is something to keep in memory's precious gallery of pictures, to take out and muse in after years with loving and gentle thoughts.

Happy the father with the Masonic wisdom to make the bond mean as much to his son as it does to him; happy the son with the wit to see how much it may mean to the older man, and, therefore how much that is high and holy it may mean to himself.