

NINE MORE QUESTIONS

(So popular was the March issue of this publication, "Nine Questions," that the Editor has been fairly overwhelmed with requests for more of the same kind." In response, this Bulletin is offered. - Ed.)

"Masonry is a secret society. We take obligations of secrecy. Yet books are printed about Masonry, and even part of the ritual is in print in the Monitor. How am I to know what I can tell and what I cannot?"

Many a newly-made Mason has asked, and not always is the answer intelligent.

Masonry is not "a secret society" but "a society with secrets." A secret society is one in which the membership, aims and ideals are unknown. There is no secret about who is, and who is not, a Freemason. Lodges publish their rosters. Many Grand Lodges publish the names of their members in annual Proceedings. The world at large knows that the aims and ideals of Freemasonry are religious, charitable, friendly, fraternal.

What is secret in Freemasonry is well phrased in the ninth Landmark as adopted by the Grand Lodge of New Jersey:

"The legend of the third degree; the means of recognition; the methods of conferring degrees; the obligations of those degrees and the ballot of every brother are, and must continue to be, inviolably secret."

In general, do not talk Masonry except with Masons. But do not get the idea that an intelligent question from a non-Mason may, not receive an intelligent answer, except it be on the matters above expressed. That a Masonic Lodge has an Altar, that its Master wears a hat, that brethren wear aprons, that a tiler stands at the door, are not "secrets" in any sense of the word. The "esoteric work" (non-printed portions of the ritual) is secret, inasmuch as it is a part of the "methods of conferring degrees." Common sense and a decent reserve will guide any Mason in what he should and should not say regarding the Order.

"Our tiler stands at the door to keep off 1cowans and evesdroppers.' What is a cowan? And what possible chance has any 'evesdropper' of 'evesdropping' at the tiler's door?"

"Cowan" is an old Scotch word, meaning an ignorant Mason who put stones together without mortar, or piled rough stones from the field into a wall without working them square and true. He is a Mason without the Word; the Apprentice who tries to masquerade as a Master. The evesdropper in ancient times was that would-be thief of secrets who listened under the eaves of houses (the walls and roofs did not always meet, in order to provide ventilation). Because to hear he had to get close to the wall under the eaves, he received the droppings from the roof, if it rained-hence, evesdropper. In modern times the evesdropper is that bold man who forges a good

standing card, or finds one and masquerades as its owner; the man who has read a so-called "expose" of Masonry and tries to get into a Lodge, in order to ask for charity or help. He is very rare, and few tilers have ever met him! The cowan, however - the Fellowcraft or Entered Apprentice stopped for cause, the onetime member in good standing who is now dropped for one cause or another - these not infrequently try to pass the tiler.

Certain words and phrases are so peculiarly Masonic and so well understood by older brethren, that surprise follows a request for a definition from a newly-made brother. Yet "Free and Accepted," "Due Form," "Ample Form," "just and legally (or lawfully) constituted," "Entered Apprentice," "Jurisdiction," "Legal (or lawful) Masonic information" are not in themselves self explanatory.

"Why are we called 'Free and Accepted' Masons?" may be answered at some length; briefly, the word goes back at least to early Rome, when workmen formed associations or guilds, called collegia. Many of these became so politically powerful that the attempt was made to restrict them. An exception was made of the college of builders, since Rome could not exist or expand without this Craft. These, then, were "free" of the restrictive laws which constrained other collegia.

In the middle ages, and during the rise of Gothic architecture, there were two distinct varieties of Masons - the Guild Masons, who, like the Guild Carpenters, or the Guild Weavers, were local in character and strictly regulated by law, and the Masons who traveled "in foreign countries" and from city to city, there to erect the magnificent cathedrals of Europe. These were "free" - from local laws and from the Guild laws. It is from these operative Masons that modern Freemasonry came - hence we are Freemasons, not just Masons.

As the operative Freemasons grew in power and prestige, they became more than builders; they were artists, scientists, mathematicians, poets, leaders. In ages when education was difficult to get and educated men few and far between, it was natural that those who were studious should like to consort with their kind. Many wanted to become Freemasons, but not to be builders in stone.. Hence the practice grew of taking in non-operatives - men who were "accepted" into the Order. As modern Freemasons are not now operative Masons, the Order adopted this word, too, and so we are "Free and Accepted Masons" almost universally.

"What is the distinction between due form and ample form?"

A Lodge is opened and closed-by its Master "in due form," meaning according to the ancient usages and customs, the laws and ritual, of its Grand Lodge. When the Grand Master opens and closes a Grand Lodge (or a particular Lodge) he is said to do so in "ample form." In some jurisdictions the Grand Master will shorten the common ritual, to save time, but his power and authority are "ample" to accomplish his purpose, regardless of the manner in which he does it.

In some jurisdictions the phrase "due examination" is used in referring to one of the methods of obtaining legal or lawful Masonic information. "Due examination" specifies the manner of such an examination; that it be conducted with due caution, and according to all the regulations of the Grand Lodge.

"What is 'just and legally (or lawfully) constituted'? Are any Lodges not 'just and legally (or lawfully) constituted'?"

A Lodge is "just" - meaning complete, properly organized, legally entitled to conduct Masonic business-when the statutory number of brethren are present, when it has the proper furniture (the Great Lights), when its Charter is present, and when it has been opened by the Master, or in his absence, the proper Warden. A Lodge is "legally constituted" when it has been "constituted, consecrated and dedicated" by a recognized and Masonically legal Grand Lodge; also, when it has been opened after notice to the brethren, if a Special, and according to the by-laws, if a Stated, meeting.

Some Lodges occasionally are neither just nor legally constituted. Opening without the lawful number of brethren present, opening without a Charter in the room, or with the Great Lights absent, makes a Lodge other than "just." Clandestine Lodges are never legally constituted. That which has no real existence cannot give real existence to its offspring. Any group of men may assemble, call themselves a Grand Lodge, proceed to issue documents which they call Charters to other bodies of men which they call Lodges. But the act does not make the result a fact. Any man may call himself a doctor, or a lawyer, or a minister of the Gospel, but the act does not make the claim a fact. Hence, spurious and clandestine Grand Lodges, which purport to create Lodges, do not, in fact, do so, and their groups, no matter how much they may claim to be Masonic Lodges, are not, actually, "legally constituted."

"What is the meaning of the word 'entered' when we speak of an 'Entered Apprentice'? Is there an Apprentice who is not 'entered'?"

The word goes back to operative days. The Freemasons of the middle ages were a select group; they were the highest class artisans of their time. It required good health, moral character, high intelligence, to be a good operative Freemason and be permitted to work on the great Houses of God which were the Freemasons' work. They were proud of their abilities and of their reputation and strict in their rules to foster character, probity and ability in their ranks.

To become a Freemason a young lad was required to serve a seven-year apprenticeship, before he might ask to be permitted to make and submit to his superiors his "Master's Piece," and be admitted as a "Fellow of the Craft." Before he could serve his time he had to prove himself; therefore he served a period of time as an Apprentice. If at the end of that period he had shown himself possessed of the necessary qualifications of industry, character, decency and probity, he was "entered" on the books of the Craft and became an "Entered Apprentice."

In modern times we have no "Apprentices" without the title "Entered," unless a petitioner, before ballot and initiation, be considered as an Apprentice.

"I meet the word 'Jurisdiction' often in Masonic work and publication, and it seems to have many meanings; what are they?"

The question is right-the word has too many meanings to be plain to the newly-raised Masons.

1. Refers to the State. The Jurisdiction of Massachusetts - the Jurisdiction of Oregon - mean the Grand Lodges and all the individual Lodges of those States.

2. Refers to the power of the Grand Master. He has jurisdiction over all the Masons in his State whether they be members of his Lodges or sojourning Masons from other Grand Lodges.

3. Refers, in "territorial jurisdiction," to the territory over which a Lodge has control as far as applications are concerned. In rural districts, jurisdictional lines are tightly drawn, that no Lodge accepts applications from men who live within the territorial jurisdiction of another Lodge. In cities, "concurrent jurisdiction" is usual, any man being free to apply to any Lodge within the city limits. The District of Columbia has only concurrent jurisdiction, there being no Lodge which has any exclusive territory.

4. Refers to the power a Lodge has over its rejected candidates; the right to give, or withhold, permission for 'rejected material to apply, elsewhere. "Penal jurisdiction," as this is sometimes called, varies in different Grand Lodges. In some, it is perpetual, in others, it lapses after a certain length of time.

"What is legal (or lawful) Masonic information?"

A question which should be explained to every new brother, immediately on his becoming a member of a Lodge.

Legal or lawful Masonic information can be obtained in three ways; you have "legal Masonic Information" that A. is a Mason when you sit in a Lodge with him: When he is vouched for to you by some one with whom you have sat in Lodge: When he passes in your presence all examination before a Committee appointed by the Master (or the Grand Master).

There is no other way in which lawful Masonic information may be obtained. A letter from your dearest friend introducing "Brother A" as a Mason is not legal Masonic information. The real Brother A may have lost the letter and it be presented by a stranger. You are not at liberty to accept an avouchment that a man is a Mason by talking over the telephone with one who knows him to be a Mason. Unless in his presence, and that of the man vouched for, you cannot know that the Mr. A spoken of over the telephone is the Mr. A you have in mind.

Nor can you legally consider your moral certainty of a man's being a Mason as "legal Masonic information." You may have seen him enter a Lodge. You may have seen his dues card, his certificate, his name in Lodge records. But unless you have sat in Lodge with him, had him vouched for by one with whom you have sat in Lodge, or assisted yourself in a legal examination, you cannot have "legal Masonic information" that he is a Mason. Only by strict adherence to these principles can Masons be sure that no cowan or evesdropper sits in their Lodges.

"The ritual speaks of the Holy Bible as the Great Light in Masonry. Yet I hear of the V. S. L. (Volume of Sacred Law) and the Book of the Law. Is any other book ever on the Altar of a Masonic Lodge beside the Bible?"

In Christian lands the holy book of the prevailing faith is the Great Light. In American and English Lodges that book is the Holy Bible. A Masonic Lodge cannot exist without the V. S. L., the Book of the Law. But in lands where there are other religions, the sacred book of those religions becomes their Great Light. What is important is that some volume containing divine revelation be a part of the furniture of the Lodge. Inasmuch as Freemasonry is not concerned with doctrine or dogma or sect or denomination, but only in "that natural religion in which all men agree (Old Charges) it is only necessary that the V.S.L. be sacred to the members of the Lodge. The Bible on American Altars is not to be considered only as a Christian or a Jewish sacred book; it is a symbol of the revealed will and teachings of the Great Architect of the Universe-a name under which any Freemason can worship that Deity in Whom he puts his faith and trust.