

OUR MASONIC RESPONSIBILITIES

This Short Talk Bulletin is adapted From a paper presented by M.W. Brother McAlister at a "Crossroads Session" of the Masonic bodies in Columbia, South Carolina in June, 1980.

I have been speaking on this subject for over forty years. Ever since I became a Mason, when I was given the opportunity to speak to Masons in Lodges or Grand Lodges, I have tried to remind them of their duties and responsibilities and impress Upon them the importance of living up to those duties and responsibilities which they have taken upon themselves voluntarily as Masons. Every man who comes into Masonry, comes of his own free will and accord. He is not invited to join the Fraternity. He must knock upon the door for admittance.

Our Masonic responsibilities can really be summed up in one word, "PRACTICE." We have the responsibility of living our Masonry before the world. Every Master Mason is charged with the practice of Masonic ideals and principles as taught in Masonry's degrees. Every Master Mason must realize the gravity of his responsibility as a Mason, and practice, in his everyday life, the principles taught at the Altar of our Lodges. In Masonry we say that it is un-Masonic to solicit members, and it is if you are speaking of asking someone to join the Fraternity. I submit, however, that we do solicit by the lives we live before the world. I submit also that to influence others to seek admission to our Fraternity by the lives we live is a far better way to get new members than by simply asking men to join. I repeat-every Master Mason should realize and be conscious of his responsibility to live Masonry in his daily life. In short, we should practice what we preach.

A Minister's daughter said to her boy friend, "Dad's sermon tonight is on the text, LOVE ONE ANOTHER. Wouldn't you like to go to church and hear him? Her boy friend replied, "I had rather stay here at your house and practice what your father's preaching."

One of the most tragic truths I know is that Masonry means so little to so many who call themselves Masons. Can you imagine the impact if suddenly every Lodge member would become a Mason in deed as well as in word; if suddenly every Lodge member would become what he professed to be; if suddenly every Lodge member would do what he is obligated to do; if suddenly he should practice what he preaches; if suddenly he should measure up to his Masonic Responsibilities.

Let us look at a few of the specific areas of our responsibility as Masons: RESPONSIBILITY to the LODGE

Every member has a duty and responsibility to the organization to which he belongs. So many receive the three degrees and then forget all about the Lodge. They seem to feel that it's somebody else's responsibility to keep the Lodge going. For a Brother to forget the Lodge that gave him his Masonic birth is like a son who would forget his mother that gave him physical birth. Suppose no one attended Lodge meetings any more than you do, nor took any more of an

active part than you do, nor showed any more interest than you do, what would have happened to your Lodge? Would it still be in existence? I quote from the charge given to you in the first degree, "Although your frequent appearance at our regular meetings is earnestly solicited, yet it is not meant that Masonry should interfere with your necessary vocations, for these are on no account to be neglected." Some interpret this to mean that it is all right for anything and everything to interfere with their Masonry.

RESPONSIBILITY to OUR COUNTRY

I quote from a charge given in the Entered Apprentice Degree: "In the state, you are to be a quiet and peaceful subject, true to your government and just to your country, you are not to countenance disloyalty or rebellion, but patiently submit to legal authority, and conform with cheerfulness to the government of the country in which you live."

We can say with the Psalmist, "I have a goodly heritage. " We enjoy the greatest freedom of any nation on the face of the earth but I have the feeling we are fast losing it. Some deliberately, some by complacency and some by simple default. We must wake up to the dangers that face our nation and do something about them. I subscribe to the words of Daniel Webster who said, "God grants liberty to those who love it and are always ready to defend it." We must let the world know that patriotism and love of freedom and individual liberty are not dead in this country. Those who lived before us were proud of their citizenship. They guarded their heritage. They defended their freedom. They kept the Torch of Liberty burning. They kept the Liberty Bell ringing. They kept the Light of Freedom shining. We should be equally proud of our citizenship, guard our heritage and defend our freedom. We must keep the Liberty Bell ringing, the Torch of Liberty burning and the Light of Freedom shining.

RESPONSIBILITY to GOD

I quote again from the charge given in the Entered Apprentice Degree. "There are three great duties which, as a Mason, you are charged to inculcate-to God, your neighbor, and yourself. To God, in never mentioning his name but with that reverential awe which is due from a creature to his Creator; to implore his aid in all your laudable undertakings, and to esteem him as the chief good." Masonry is not a religion, but a Mason is religious, a man who believes in God. He must acknowledge his belief in God before he can be made a Mason. Everything in Masonry has reference to God. It implies God, speaks of God, points and leads to God. There is not a degree, nor a symbol, nor a lecture, nor a charge but finds its meaning and derives its beauty from God, the Great Architect of the Universe. Every Lodge is erected to God and dedicated to Holy Sain's and labors in God's name. No initiate enters a Lodge without first kneeling and confessing his faith and trust in God. A true Mason is a Godly man.

A Mason is a man who believes in prayer. We are to implore His aid in all our laudable undertakings. We are taught never to begin any great or important undertaking without first invoking the blessings of Diety. One of the greatest privileges God ever gave to mortal man is the privilege of prayer, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." (Matt 7: 7) One of the greatest unused powers in the world today is the power of prayer. Prayer is the key that unlocks the storehouse of God's bounty. One of the

greatest tragedies is that men fail to exercise the privilege of prayer, "ye have not, because ye ask not." (Ja. 4: 4)

There is the story of an ancient king who was a good ruler and a Godly man. He worshipped regularly in his church and was a great believer in prayer. As he grew older, he suffered hardening of the arteries, yet he still attended worship services. In the service when the Minister would say, "Let us pray," the old monarch would say aloud, "By all means, let us pray. "

Many of you probably remember the story of the doctor in a small French village who was about to retire. He had been on call day and night; the people could not afford to pay him much, but that had made no difference. He cared for them as he was able. As the day of his retirement approached, the people wished to make a concrete expression of their gratitude and affection. It was proposed that on a given day (since they had so little money to give) they each bring a pitcher of wine from their own cellars and pour it in a large barrel. The day arrived and all day long the people were seen pouring their offerings into the barrel.

The evening came and the barrel was taken to the doctor's residence and presented with inevitable speeches.

The presentation over, the people went back to their homes and the doctor was left alone with the memory of their love. He went to the barrel and drew off a bit of wine and went into the house and there sat comfortably by the fire to enjoy it. The first sip was a shock. It tasted like water. He sipped again-it was water. He went back to the barrel and drew off some more, thinking that there must have been some mistake. But, no, the barrel was filled with water. He called the Mayor and the Mayor called the Assemblymen and there were hurried consultations. **THE TRUTH WAS REVEALED.** Everyone in town had reasoned: My little pitcher of wine won't be missed. I have so little for myself. The others will take care of it. The little water I substituted will not be noticed.

It is a tragic story. It may never have happened, but it is the kind of thing that can and does happen when people refuse to accept their responsibilities, and when they reason as the Frenchmen did. . . I have so little for myself. . . Others will take care of it. This is the attitude of so many Masons concerning the Lodge. Oft times it is the dedication and devotion of a few in a Lodge of two or three hundred that keep the Lodge alive and active. The following lines illustrate what I am trying to say:

I have no voice for singing I cannot make a speech I have no gift for music, I know I cannot teach. I am no good at leading I cannot organize And anything I write, Would never win a prize. But at the roll call in the meetings I always answer, "Here," When others are performing I lend a listening ear. After the program's over I praise its every part, My words are not to flatter, I mean them from my heart. It seems my only talent is neither big nor rare, just to listen and encourage And to fill a vacant chair. But all the gifted people Could not so brightly shine, Were it not for those who use A talent such as mine.

An old timer whose income was from ferrying passengers across a river was asked, "How many times a day do you cross the river?" He replied, "I go as often as I can. The more I go the more I

get. If I don't go, I don't get." So it is with attending Lodge meetings. The more we go, the more we get out of our Lodge membership. If we don't go, we don't get.

Two drunks were out riding one day. The driver lost control, ran off the road and crashed into a telephone pole. The car was demolished. Both men were knocked unconscious for a short while. They both regained consciousness at about the same time. One said to the other, "Didn't you see that telephone pole?" The other replied, "Yeah, I saw it, but I thought you were driving."

Before I became a Mason, I had the idea that Freemasonry was a tight organization whose obligations did not go beyond the bounds of the Lodge. The bounds of the Lodge I took to be its membership, and that Masons were under obligation to practice Masonry with Masons and no more. Then I discovered the real bounds of the Lodge: "A Lodge is said, symbolically, to extend in length from the east to the west; in breadth from north to south; in height, from the earth to the highest heavens; in depth, from the surface to the center. A Lodge is said to be of these vast dimensions to denote the universality of Masonry, and to teach us that a Mason's charity should be equally extensive." In other words, the Lodge is a symbol of the world.

Let us never forget the purpose of Freemasonry. Some person has imagined a conversation between the devil and an angel. The angel proudly told the devil that a way had been found to defeat him. When he asked how it would be done, he told him that God was going to give to men lofty ideals and challenging principles to be proclaimed to the world. The devil just laughed, and told the angel that he could not be defeated that way, for all he would have to do would be to institutionalize the ideals and principles, and it would be only a matter of time until men would forget the ideals and principles as they tried to keep the institution alive. Someone explained it this way: First the idea creates the organization, and then the organization chokes the idea.

It is important that we keep the organization of Masonry alive, but we must not forget the ideas and ideals that gave it birth. Our responsibility goes beyond the Lodge.

A little girl was saying her prayers in a whisper. Her mother said, "Speak louder, I can't hear you." The little girl replied, "I wasn't talking to you."

A little boy getting ready for bed interrupted a family gathering in the living room to say, "I'm going to say my prayers, anybody want anything?"

Kathy, the daughter of Robert Young, was praying. She thanked God for his many blessings and asked Him for the things she needed, she then closed her prayer by asking, "Now God, what can I do for you?" RESPONSIBILITY to OUR FELLOWMAN

Again, we read from the charge: "To your neighbor, in acting upon the square, and doing unto him as you wish he should do unto you."

THE MEASURE of MAN

Not-How did he die? but-How did he live?

Not-What did he gain? but-What did he give? These are the things that measure the worth Of a man as a man, regardless of his birth

Not-What was his station? but-Had he a heart?

And-How did he play his God given part?

Was he ever ready with a word of good cheer,

To bring back a smile, to banish a tear?

Not-What was his church? nor-What was his creed?

But-Had he befriended those really in need?

Not-What did the sketch in the newspaper say?

But-How many were sorry when he passed away?

These are the things that measure the worth

Of a man as a man, regardless of his birth.

RESPONSIBILITY to YOURSELF

We read again from the Entered Apprentice Degree Charge:

"To yourself, in avoiding all irregularity and intemperance, which may impair your faculties, or debase the dignity of your profession. "

I believe that it is my duty and your duty to take the life that God has given us and make the very best out of it that's possible for us to make.

YOUR TASK-To build a better world-God said. I answered-"How"? "The world is such a large vast place so complicated now and I so small and useless am; There's nothing I can do." But God in all His wisdom said "Just build a better you."