

Sugar Coating Masonic Education

HOWEVER improper curiosity may be as a principal motive for applying for the degrees, it is probable that no man ever passed through the West Gate for his initiation as an Entered Apprentice without an eager desire to know "what will happen next ?"

Immediately thereafter the candidate usually develops a healthy curiosity as to the "why" of that which "happened next." Entered Apprentices and Fellowcrafts are generally hungry for explanations of reasons for motives behind the words and acts of a degree.

Man is incurably curious; his desire to know and to understand is the mainspring of invention, discovery, civilization, progress; it is the driving force which leads men to learn.

Worshipful Masters can---and many of them do---make use of this desire to know, to make better Masons of the brethren of their lodges. Masters are charged with the duty of giving the Craft "good and wholesome instruction," or causing the same to be done. But one of the principal methods developed by Masonic educators, the "educational meeting," is a method of instruction more injured than helped by its name! For many brethren had boyish experience with "4 c education" which lead them to associate with that word a process which is dry, dull, uninteresting.

What is here called a "sugar coated" Masonic educational meeting is just the reverse; interesting, intriguing, alive, vital, satisfying a great curiosity. Lodges which have tried any of the educational experiments here listed usually repeat them, and almost invariably the repetition is to a packed house."

Here are some suggestions for "sugar coated" educational meetings; all of them have been tried, and all found successful methods of interesting the Craft in various phases of Freemasonry.

1. Breaking Rules to Mend Them

Certain unwritten rules of Masonic conduct, as well as some specified by Grand Lodges, become so much a matter of custom in lodges that many brethren lose sight of the reasons therefore, if, indeed, they ever knew them.

The Worshipful Master may arrange a program in which a number of brethren, instructed beforehand, deliberately commit or attempt to commit infractions of rules. When the error is made, the Master, or some previously instructed brother, explains the mistake and the reason for it. For instance, in most jurisdictions it is not considered courteous for a brother to pass between the Altar and the Worshipful Master (except in the process of conferring a degree). When the instructed brother crosses the lodge between Altar and East, the Master may admonish the "culprit" that it is not considered proper, and call upon some previously instructed Past Master to explain that, in theory, the Great Light and the Square and Compasses on the Altar, dedicated

to God, the Master and the Craft, are in charge of the Master, and therefore at no time should his view of them be interrupted. A brother who attempts to leave the room during a ballot may be corrected, and the reason given; Grand Lodges usually hold that a ballot on petition, interrupted by any one entering or leaving the room, is invalid, since such action may interfere with the secrecy of the ballot. Similarly, a brother balloting may object to the officer in charge of the ballot box standing so close to the Altar that he might discover how the brother votes. Either or both of these incidents provide an excellent opportunity for a little talk upon the sacredness and secrecy of the Masonic ballot and its importance. Speaking more than twice to the same question, speaking without being recognized, speaking without rising, addressing an individual brother or the lodge instead of the Master, making a motion to appoint a committee with a specified personnel, offering a resolution "to adjourn" or to "lay on the table," are suggested infractions of Masonic law and custom, all of which may be corrected in an educational and interesting way.

2. Dissecting a Degree

Especially recommended for lodges which have little work to do is the dissection and explanation of the first section of any degree. A dummy candidate is initiated, and the ceremony interrupted at each stage by some brother who offers a little explanation of the symbolism of the part of the degree under discussion; entry, circumambulation, rite of destitution, the antiquity of the apron, origin of the Lesser Lights, etc. Such dissection and exposition of parts of a degree require some little study by those who take part, but by giving each brother who offers an interruption only one subject, the work of preparation is minimized and the variety increased by having many take part.

It is suggested here that inquiry be first made of the District Deputy, or the Grand Master; in some jurisdictions the practice of using a dummy candidate has been frowned upon, as derogatory to the dignity of our ceremonies. When it is explained that the purpose of the idea is educational, however, it is probable that no difficulty will be experienced in obtaining enthusiastic cooperation from those in authority.

3. "You Must-You Must Not"

The average lodge member knows little about Masonic law. The very term "Jurisprudence" seems repellent. Yet Masonic law is intensely interesting, and may be made to appear so to the lodge by any brother who will devote a little time and attention to developing a talk on those parts of our legal system which most intimately touch the brethren. Masonic law is vastly different from civil law; most Masonic law is a matter of "thou shalt" rather than "thou shalt not." A few salient points chosen for their interest to the average Mason, and explained, first as to their origin, and second, as to their use or necessity, will interest any lodge. It is not at all an arduous task for a clever brother to arrange such a talk; he may use any good book on jurisprudence as a foundation, Mackey or Pound for choice, as both are complete and concise.

4. "Competition Is the Life of--Education!"

The more brethren take part in an educational meeting, the greater the enjoyment. No scheme for

an educational meeting yet developed exceeds the lodge contest in this respect, since it gives every one in the lodge room an opportunity to participate.

The educational contest is conducted by a Master of Ceremonies asking a series of questions, carefully prepared in advance, the correct answers to which can be given in one or two words, a date, a name. Supplied with paper and pencils, the brethren write and number their answers to the questions, as they are asked. Then they exchange papers, the correct answers are read, and the brethren mark the replies "right" or "wrong" according to the facts. The winners, of course, are those who have the greatest number, next greatest number and third greatest number answered correctly. Interest in such a contest is increased by offering prizes. These may be very inexpensive; a good Masonic book, a subscription to a Masonic magazine, a Masonic lapel @n, are all appreciated.

The questions should not be complex; answers should be facts, not opinions. For instance "In what lodge was George Washington raised?" "Who is Grand Master in this State?" "How old is this lodge?" "How many lodges in our Grand Lodge?" are all questions needing but a word or two to answer with facts. Such questions as "Do you think Masonry is a religion?" should not be included, since any answer must be an opinion, not a fact. Questions like "Explain the part Freemasonry played in the Revolution" should not be asked, as they require lengthy replies.

In giving out the correct answers, a clever Master of Ceremonies will be able to offer some "good and wholesome instruction" of Masonic value; for instance, if the question be "How many landmarks are recognized in this jurisdiction?... and the correct answer is "Twenty- five," the Master of Ceremonies may explain that some jurisdictions have less, others more; that many jurisdictions have adopted Mackey's list, while others have condensed Mackey's twenty-five into a less number, which nevertheless contains all of Mackey's points, and so on.

5. "Let's Argue the Matter!"

A lodge debate will draw a crowd and keep it interested for the best part of an hour, with pleasure and profit to all. Debating teams may be composed of two or more brethren on one side; two to a side usually produce a snappier debate than three. Some questions of universal Masonic interest should be chosen, such as "Resolved, that dual membership is advantageous to the Fraternity," or "Resolved, that Masonic trials are better conducted by a Grand Lodge Commission than the particular lodge."

Debaters should be strictly limited as to time; ten minutes each for presentation and argument, pro and con, and two or three minutes to a side for rebuttal are sufficient. Such disposition of time will result in nearly an hour of argument, which is sufficient. The lodge should then vote as to which side is the winner, and the prize, if any, be awarded.

Such debates are planned in advance. An impromptu debate often produces amusing results. Two captains are chosen; each captain chooses six debaters. The Master then announces the subject. Each debater is given two minutes and must sit down when the gong rings at the end of his time, even if in the middle of a sentence. The simpler the subject, the more lively the debate. Such questions as "Resolved, that this lodge should start a library," or "Resolved, that the fees for the

degrees are too low" (or too high!) will produce more debate than more abstruse questions, because brethren seldom argue well on difficult matters unless they have previously spent some time in preparation.

It is not suggested that these "sugar coated" methods of holding Masonic educational meetings should replace the older, tried and true forms, in which some learned brother delivers an address upon a Masonic subject, or presents an illustrated lecture. The speaker and the lecturer we have always with us; illustrated lectures on Masonic subjects will always be of interest to the Craft, as will the well conceived and delivered address.

But we tire of anything in too great quantities; quail is considered the best of eating, yet it is a restaurant's tradition that no man can eat a quail a day for a month!

The Masonic educational meeting conducted on new, different lines--of which the above list is only suggestive, not complete--will largely "take the curse off" the word "educational." Brethren who are provided with "sugar coated" education do not stay away on 'Educational nights" but come out in full force. Once get a lodge membership to thinking "Wonder what new idea the Master will spring on us tonight!" when an educational meeting is announced, and the stewards will have to go to the basement after extra chairs.

Sugar coated pills do the same work as those more difficult to swallow-and they are much easier to take!