

Whither are we Travelling?

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An article written by brother Dwight L. Smith, Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Indiana and reproduced in the Transactions of the Masters' and Past Masters' Lodge (NZ) issue 130 in November, 1964 & shared with "The Educator" by . Robert Taylor. United Grand Lodge of .& and .(Australia)

At the outset I may as well precipitate an argument by disposing of the old favourites. Whatever attendance troubles our Lodges may be having, are not caused by television, nor the motor car, nor by bowls, nor 'togetherness', nor any of the other 'busyness' in which our restless society is engaged.

A multitude of activities may contribute to a decline in Lodge attendance, but they do not constitute the cause. When we complain of lack of attendance, what we really are saying is that INTEREST is at a low ebb, for in any organization, if there is interest, there will be attendance. No amount of television or bowling or 'busyness' can usurp the position of eminence a Lodge of Freemasons occupies in a man's loyalty if the Lodge is in a position to command his loyalty.

The ailment is not quite that simple. We are looking at the symptoms – not the disease.

The real source of the troubles is within ourselves.

Such problems as we may have will not be solved by forcing men to memorise a set of questions and answers, not by cramming books and lectures down their throats, nor by devoting our energies and resources to other organizations or movements, however worthy, they may be.

The cure is not that simple either. The patient's indisposition will not be relieved by nostrums. The treatment must come from within.

The Lodge which demands little gets little. It expects loyalty, but does almost nothing to put a claim on a man's loyalty. When we ourselves place a cheap value on Masonic membership, how can we expect new members to prize it?

Do we pay enough attention to the Festive Board? This is not merely the partaking of refreshments at the conclusion of a degree working. It is the Hour of Refreshment in all its beauty and dignity; an occasion for inspiration and fellowship; a time when the noble old traditions of the Craft are preserved.

Is there not a danger that this so-called Century of the Common Man may tend to make our Fraternity a little too common? We cannot expect to retain the prestige of the Craft if we allow without challenge a lowering of our standards.

Let us be sure that well-meaning Brethren do not work overtime to make Freemasonry into something other than Freemasonry. We must not lose sight of the fact that one of the reasons our Fraternity is prized so highly is that it does **NOT** operate like other organizations.

Take a long and thoughtful look at the names of the men who served our Lodges as Masters fifty or more years ago. Consider the positions of importance those men occupied in their respective communities. Then let us ask ourselves if the position is the same today.

We cannot escape the fact that men judge Masonry by those they know to be members. If what they see does not command their respect, then to them Freemasonry is not a worthwhile institution.

We must re-establish that Freemasonry is a Pearl of Great Price, worth a great deal of effort, a great deal of sacrifice, a great deal of waiting to obtain.

Has Freemasonry become too easy to obtain?

Given the challenge to practise Masonic charity in its intimate and personal form almost any Lodge and almost any member of it will respond with enthusiasm. Freemasonry will then come to have a new meaning for them.

Any Lodge, large or small, which experiences the joy of giving in a truly personal act of charity discovers that literally it has been born again.

For many Masons, fellowship is a most precious jewel. It is necessary for the very existence of our Fraternity. If Brethren cannot find it in their Craft Lodges they will find it elsewhere. We need to cultivate fellowship with all our zeal. We need the inspiration of our Festive Board; we need to revive those old traditions of the Craft. But if the Festive Board is to serve its purpose it must be joyful as well as dignified. It must be appropriate to the time and place.

One thing and only one thing a Masonic Lodge can give its members which they can get nowhere else in the world. That one thing is Masonry.

Masonic light must come from the east. Instruction by a teacher that knows less than his pupil is neither good nor wholesome. The programme of instruction must have diversity, the doses must not be large, and it must avoid dullness as if it was the plague.

Who among us has faith to "Lay his course by a star which he has never seen, to dig by the divining rod for springs which he may

never reach?" (Oliver Wendell Holmes).

In our concern for the 'Common Man' we overlook an important principle of applied psychology. Too much emphasis on common men and common things can serve to make common that which should be uncommon.

When we cease to set a lofty mark and expect our Brethren to measure up to it, when we permit a downward adjustment to conform to practices and manners that are casual and lax, we are dealing our Fraternity a double blow. We cannot expect to maintain the prestige of the Craft if we ourselves accept a lower standard; our members will respect Freemasonry more if they know there are certain rules to which they are expected to conform; in behaviour, in dress, language and decorum.

All I advocate is that Freemasonry remain Freemasonry; and if we have strayed from the traditional path, we had better be moving back while there is yet time to restore the respect and prestige, the interest, loyalty and devotion that once was ours.

In the restless superficial age in which we live we are impatient unless our organized bodies have slogans, carry banners and make pronouncements about every subject under the sun. We want them to follow the conventional pattern, to publish aims and objectives, and in general to have a finger in every pie. Freemasonry does none of these. It is strange that our ancient Craft should have gained for itself such a pre-eminent position of honour when it does nothing in the conventional manner.

Then what does Freemasonry do? *It erects its Temples within the hearts of men.*

Freemasonry has not been tried in the balance and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried.

“Freemasonry has more to offer to the 20th century than the 20th century has to offer Freemasonry.” (Dean Roscoe Pound to the members of his Lodge).

My faith in the basic worth of our ancient Craft is unshaken. I am convinced that the solution to Freemasonry’s problems is Freemasonry.

Why do we not try it?

It is realised that there are ‘bits and pieces’ extracted from here and there of the original article, but they do show that they are written by someone whose Freemasonry is no different from ours.

Comment

Once again we are reminded that NUMBERS do not make Freemasonry successful.

The reality is that if we as existing Freemasons do not pay proper attention to the

Education & Development of our existing Brethren our foundation will erode.

Have a Wonderful Day & God Bless

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