

THE ALMONER AND HIS DUTIES

Though the Premier Grand Lodge was formed in 1717, followed by the Antients Grand Lodge in 1751, and the fact that the Premier Grand Lodge in the general regulations of 1723 make mentions of Charity Funds for both private Lodges and Grand Lodge. Nothing however appears to have been done to impliment these funds (at least as far as Grand Lodge was concerned) until 1724 when it was proposed that a Charity Fund be established. No one appeared to take notice of this fund, for in 1727 the Deputy Grand Master said he was extremely concerned that in so long a time he had not received one shilling from Lodges or any brother. Though there is mention of Stewards, there is no mention of an Almoner. This may be the reason why we find on reading the Quarterly Communications for the 18th Century we find payments to the Grand Charity were very irregular to say the least.

Though the Office of Chaplain was established as an additional Office in 1796 in the Premier Grand Lodge, it would appear that the Office of Almoner along with the D.C., his Assistant, Organist, Asst. Sec, and Stewards were not introduced (as additional Offices) after the union of the two Grand Lodges in 1814.

The willingness of the Antient Freemasons to help their distressed brethren had been noticed and there is frequent reference in the minutes to the family of a needy brother. The importance of assisting the children led one lodge to start a special fund for this purpose. Observing with concern the distressed circumstances of several of their brethren, and the exposed situation of their children, at the same time viewing with pleasure the daily progress making in the (Premier Grand Lodge), Freemasons Charity in St. Georges Fields, For Female Children, induced them at a meeting of the Charity in 1798 to consider the means for to establish a Masonic Charity for clothing the sons of indigent Freemasons. As mentioned the date of the Premier Grand Lodge founding of the charity for the female children was 1788. Yet we see no appearance of the Almoner. The moderns of Premier Grand Lodge also founded a Charity for the Boys in 1808, but in 1817 after the union the two boys Charities were formed into one which was known as the Royal Masonic Institution for Boys. In 1842 the Annuity Fund for Brethren was opened and that for widows in 1849. In 1850 the Asylum for the elderly was established at Croydon, good sense prevailing these two new Charities were amalgamated in 1850 as the Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution. In 1933 the present Hospital was built at Ravenscourt Park, previously to which the former Hospital was in the Brompton Road. In two world wars these

two Hospitals were turned over as Freemasons' war Hospitals, since 1933, the hospital at Ravenscourt Park has been known as the Royal Masonic Hospital.

→ THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS.

Since 1945 there have been vast changes in our Charities, the Girls and the boys has now been amalgamated into the Masonic Trust for Girls and Boys. The School became in 1978 an independent educational establishment operating in the private sector. The only difference between this and the other independent schools is that it is obliged to receive girls placed there by the Trust. The boys school was closed and sold some years ago and the boys are now all educated. The R.M.B.I. Homes now total sixteen in different parts of the Country. Finally there is the Grand Charity to which we all contribute on the Grand Lodge return of membership. All the other charities have to be supported by Covenants, including the Samaritan Fund of the Royal Masonic Hospital, which is used to assist Masonic patients (Husbands and wives) who cannot afford on their income to pay the full cost of treatment. I might add the Grand Charity is used to assist those cases which none of the other Charities by their Constitutions can assist and are allowed to give grants up to £1500 per year. They also distribute to recommended Charities outside the Craft. You might now ask where the Almoner fits in, as I have said there is no trace of his duties other than being such an Office as an additional Officer after the union.

In our Lodges today most brethren think of the Almoner as that brother who receives the alms on the night of the meeting. Our own Provincial Grand Lodge as do many others, ^{are} putting more emphasis on the Charity Steward, as officially he is now the collector of your Covenants, and the person to whom Provincial Grand Lodge look to coerce you into parting with your money, i.e. he is the man who collects the Almoner is the man who has the responsibility submitting petitions to the various charities on behalf of brethren or their dependents, and in addition to keep an eye on the widows and the sick members of the Lodge.

The Almoners work is of much importance both to the Craft as a whole and to the lodge in particular. We have in Lodges in the past tend to forget about those who for ill health and other causes we no longer see at our Lodges. When I was Master of the Lodge, I found the oldest member of our Lodge a brother residing near Paddington Station with his wife. He had moved around, and we appeared to have lost him. I made contact with him and continued that contact until they had both passed on. Shortly after coming out of the ~~Post Masters Chair~~ I became Almoner of the Lodge and found we

OFFICE OF D.C.

we had seventeen Widows, and Aged brethren and wives who only wished to see one of the old faces now and again. Brethren this was the commencement of our Christmas visits with flowers etc. We are one of a few Lodges who carry out this work and the brethren of this Lodge can be proud for what is done for these people. None of these brethren are in need nor are our widows, and so they do not come under any of the Charities, but they do like to know that we remember them. At Xmas one is lucky if you can make more than four visits in a day, but it is a wonderful experience.

Where we have brethren in distress or any of our widows, then as Almoner, I have to prepare 'Petition' for assistance. These cases can be most difficult, for the various institutions look very closely at the financial status of the applicant, and believe me brethren it is at times very hard to get a widow to admit she is on the bottom rung of the ladder. We have been very lucky in that we have had two widows obtain assistance to stay in Nursing Homes, both have unfortunately passed away. One of whom, her first husband was a member in China before the war. He had died, and she remarried again, when her second husband passed away her health deteriorated and she was brought to our attention. Through her first Husband's old Lodge I was able to obtain a grant from the Far East Charity Fund to assist her. The remarkable thing was that Grand Charity approached me following the petition being sent to the Far East, and asked if they could do something. I informed them that I did not think we could approach the Grand Charity as she had lost her second husband. I am informed that the Grand Charity can consider all cases with a maximum sum of £1500 per year, The R.M.B.I. however cannot deal with such a case.

The completion of Petitions takes a good deal of time and patience, and one knows one is fighting against time on every occasion, it is hard work, but when you see the results it is a job worthwhile. So brethren your Almoner works not only for you and the Lodge but even for other Provinces and Districts of our own Grand Lodge. It is as I have said a very important Office as far as the Lodge is concerned, but brethren it cannot be done successfully without the help and information passed to me by yourselves.

May I also inform you that no Petition for a member or widow of a member of this Lodge can be completed by the Almoner without your help, as all Petitions concerning this Lodge have got to be put to the Lodge by the Almoner for Approval, (without naming the person) for your authority to send it on to the Province.

Normally a Petitioner has to be on supplementary Pension, before Grand Lodge will move, and there is a limit to what they can give

before the State will claw it back from the Supplementary Pension. If the Craft agree an Annuity, then at each Christmas, the Province, send a cheque to the Annuitant, this is in addition to what they are receiving. If however an Annuitant sells the home and of course receives the capital, then the Annuity is cancelled until such time as the person concerned has gone through the capital. This is very important when we carry out this work, the same operates if a person sells their property and hands the capital to any children, then like the N.H.S. they would not entertain an application for assistance. Brethren this has been done in one case some years ago in this Province.

We must remember brethren that the Craft is not a philanthropic Society, but are willing to assist those worse off than ourselves, if it is necessary, but our obtaining of Charity is not a right.

I hope brethren that this short talk may help you to dig a little deeper into your pockets, not only for the Aids Collection, but to encourage you to take out Covenants with the Charity Steward. As they used to say in my mother Lodge when the Almoner was invested, the D.C. used to call the brethren to clap once for the Almoner, with the words "You never know brethren"

Finally my thanks to W.Bro. C.H. Noble for reading this paper in my absence, I shall think of you all at nine p.m. on this evening.