

SECRECY.

The Latin inscription on the Seal of Grand Lodge exhorts Masons "to see, to hear and to remain silent", and in the ritual they are told that "secrecy consists in an inviolable ^{adherence} ~~attachment~~, etc"; so effectively has this injunction been observed in the past that only by the most diligent research has it been possible to partially uncover the history of the Craft.

In ancient times, it was no doubt essential that the utmost secrecy should be observed, as disclosure may not only have imperilled the life of the informant, but those of his Brethren also. To-day, however, there is no such risk, and we leave it on the highest authority that inviolable secrecy now only applies to the g--- and s---, and the nature of our ceremonies. Moreover, there is an abundance of Masonic literature available to the "uninitiated or popular world who are not Freemasons" which largely discloses the principles on which the Order is founded, and the objects it has in view.

Yet it is surprising how little this literature is known among the Brethren, and how unwilling many of them are to give any sort of information to a non-Mason. That this attitude is not uncommon is shown by the following address by W. Bro. L.H. Sloggett, P.M., Dorset Lodge 5146, delivered at a Meeting of the St. Botolphs Lodge 2020, and reported in the Freemason of 19th November, 1932 :-

It is my belief that the Craft would be much better and stronger than it is to-day if those who seek to participate in the Light of our mysteries, were first enlightened in our objects. Many of you will agree with me that by those means we should maintain the interest of the considerable number of members who now drop out of active membership owing to lack of sympathy after the glamour of the initiation passes, and the raising to the Third Degree has faded.

It is only those whose heart and soul is embedded in the Craft who carry on and work for the good objects of Freemasonry, and it is to those to whom non-Masons turn for help and guidance

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when their interest in its work is first aroused. Let us, then, put ourselves in the position of a typical non-Mason - a man after our own heart. He will be ignorant of much that we do, but may perhaps be aware of our general principles, and altogether we must excuse any doubts which may have crept into his mind as to the nature of our ideals.

In considering what might be told to a non-Mason, it will simplify my lecture if I divide my remarks under separate headings. Firstly, should we approach non-Masons, or should they approach us, in regard to joining the Lodge? Secondly, how should the historical and symbolical teachings of Masonry be described? Thirdly, the importance of true friendship in Freemasonry. Fourthly, the origin of our secrets, and the reason for secrecy. Fifthly, what does Freemasonry teach? Sixthly, the fallacy of the suggestion that we support each other on all occasions, and lastly, the proper meaning of the phrase that "we should set on the square".

Let us take the first point - to what extent is a Mason justified in suggesting to a friend that he become a member of the Craft? My firm opinion is that the approach should come from the friend. That is not merely my view; it is laid down in the Book of Constitutions, but it is well that it should be more widely known, for many Masons hold the opposite view. Though they may be transgressing the letter of the law, they are probably doing so unwittingly, and in the vast majority of cases are undoubtedly doing much good work for the Craft by introducing among us men who will later prove themselves ^{worthy} of the confidence we have reposed in them.

Our second point was - how should the historical and symbolical teachings of Masonry be described? To do this we must go back to the beginning and try to trace its history. That many of our signs and symbols are to be seen in the ancient figures and carvings in Egypt is well known; their meaning was disclosed

only to those deemed worthy of knowing them, and to those only were they intelligible. Religious secrets of the priests were thereby kept from their followers, and so, through the carrying out of those principles by the Greeks and Romans we come to Masonry as we know it - its mysteries kept from general knowledge by each member of the Craft strictly observing its secrets; a universal brotherhood held together by those secrets; a society of men working for good and along uniform and well-laid out lines.

Tradition has it that King Solomon's Temple was built by Masons working as members of separate Lodges under the eye of the Grand Master of that time. Every worker had to be proficient in his work and each had to perform his allotted task, with the result that when the Temple was finished it was proclaimed the noblest edifice the then world had ever seen. But what is more important is that it had been built by brethren in whose heart was a sincere desire to do not only his own set task but to help his fellow-workers when they needed assistance. Briefly, it was an inspiring example to those who were not Masons - and as such we can regard our Craft even to this day. To-day we are not operative but speculative Masons; we are not engaged in building a great Temple in an operative sense, but symbolically we are raising a structure of brotherhood which can and will be an inspiration to our present-day world. Each one of us can be said to be doing our work for F.A.M.S. - carrying out his precepts and working in unison to bring to perfection a great symbolic Temple. Such principles may be easily observed in a Mason, in whatever walk of life he may be serving; they may be known to everyone; and Masonry would gain if they were more widely appreciated by those of the outside or popular world who are not Masons.

Which brings us to our third point - the importance of friendship in regard to Masonry. Friendship may be said to be one of the important foundations of our beliefs; it is an attribute of which we are all proud, and one feature of Freemasonry is that that principle of true friendship binds every member one to another.

Its principles, tenets and beliefs must be accounted noble by all that know them; and the very fact that they are noble should, and does, make us feel that they should be more widely known, though naturally we can never reveal our sacred secrets to those not lawfully entitled to them. Though our ceremonies are religious, Freemasonry cannot be said to be a religion; admittedly, it demands a firm belief in God; it reminds us of our inevitable destiny when life here shall be no more; it teaches us the truths of universal brotherhood; that we should regard the V.S.L. as our set standard; and it tells us to turn to Him for guidance and support. But, in addition, our Freemasonry teaches us the wisdom of charity and benevolence; it urges us to assist those who are feeble; to stretch out a hand to a friend or brother in time of need; and to love our fellow men. Religion plays its part in each of these principles, but Freemasonry goes yet further, for it touches the practical side of our life, brings out perhaps more clearly the benefits of universal brotherhood, and helps to bring out in all of us that fundamental feeling of friendship without which Freemasonry is incomplete.

Our non-Masonic friends sometimes have a suspicious feeling about Freemasonry, engendered, perhaps, by its secret nature. They may be likened to Nature itself, for wherever we turn in Nature there are secrets which have as yet not been discovered; our secrets, on the other hand, serve to show the world-wide nature of our brotherhood; no matter where we are or where we may be, we are always able to recognise a brother; our signs and tokens are limited to that purpose, and by their means the path of helping a brother is made the more easy.

Secrecy to this extent is an essential part of our Craft, for without it the purpose of the fraternity would be lost. Secrecy, though, is not inherent in our charity, as witness the wonderful Institutions and the Hospital. At the same time, of course, we practise a lot of unostentatious charity - so much so, that when a brother is helped, not even the members of his own

Lodge are told the name, which is known only to the Almoner and the Committee. Briefly, beyond our obligations taken in Lodge, our signs and tokens and our ceremonies, the world may know our principles our ideals and our teachings.

What does Freemasonry teach? Sometimes we hear it suggested that by the vows he has to take, a Mason is forced to subordinate his life to Masonry. Masons, though, know full well how untrue this is, for we have only to look at one phrase in our ritual to discover that in our vows there is nothing incompatible with our civil, moral or religious duties. Those vows do, however, lead a man to think seriously, to think less of himself and more of others, to be less selfish in his daily life. His thoughts are guided to a higher plane, where sacrifice is a watchword and where service to others is a fundamental principle. In a few words, he is taught to think seriously. The brethren will recall the words used at every Installation meeting, which, to my mind, represents true philosophy of Freemasonry.

Our sixth point deals with the fallacy that we support each other on all occasions and under any circumstances. It is a point each of us may have to meet sooner or later. We know the suggestion to be untrue in fact, but it is true that we pledge ourselves to recognize the brotherly nature of our society, that we are careful to preserve a brother's secrets as our own, and that we bring into our daily life that practice open for all to see in the V.S.L. - that of doing unto others as we would wish they should do to us. It goes without saying that all this depends on the character of the fellow-Mason; should he have shown himself unworthy of the obligations he has taken, it naturally follows that he is unworthy of the brotherly benefits those obligations have conferred on him. While we are dealing with this aspect, let us take and face the arguments most frequently brought up - that of two men seeking a certain appointment, one being a Mason and the other a non-Mason, the former being unsuited and unfitted for the job and the other fully qualified to carry it out satisfactorily. If a true Mason is to decide

which to appoint, he should remember one of his principles - to act on the square, or, in other words, to appoint the man best fitted for the particular work. There should be no other thought, for to depart from such a standard is bound to lead to lack of confidence in any society of men, and particularly to a lowering of public confidence in the Craft.

Which leads one to another point - that of wearing Masonic emblems on our ordinary wearing apparel. On many occasions such an action is liable to be misconstrued. We have our own means of recognising a Brother - surely they are sufficient?

Let us always bear in mind that excellent phrase - to "act on the square". I began by comparing our life in Masonry with the building of a symbolic Temple. If that Temple is to be an inspiration to others, every stone that is laid, every upright that is placed in position, ~~and~~ be accurately laid - it must be laid on the square. So we can carry the meaning into our daily life. Let everything we do be done "on the square", for by these means we shall be helping to build up a temple, perfect in its parts, and worthy of the builder.

Finally, I think I interpret the precepts of Freemasonry when I say that Masonry is not measured by knowledge, eloquence or standing in daily life. It is measured by the presence in a man's mind of a genuine love of his fellow-creatures; of a desire to see the good in man; and of the spontaneous helping of a fellow-creature in his time of need. These are, and should be, the outstanding characteristics of a Freemason, and they are all open for the world to see. Everything we can do to disperse the idea that we are anything but true believers in brotherly love will surely tend to raise Freemasonry higher in the eyes of those who are as yet undecided to join what is undoubtedly the most valuable society to mankind.

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