

WHO WILL FOLLOW IN OUR TRAIN?

by

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The title of this address is a challenge to every Freemason. As a father contemplates his children as his only means of projecting himself into the future, so must every Freemason contemplate every applicant for admission, every candidate progressing through the degrees as his successor in the sacred mysteries. This raises two questions in the mind of every true Mason, the first being, "Am I living up to the standards that are suggested in our esoteric work, in the ancient charges, the constitution of Grand Lodge, the bylaws of my Lodge and above all the Volume of the Sacred Law, on which our Order is based", and so setting a proper example to my junior Brethren. The second question is, "Am I so guarding the portals of my own Lodge so as to assure with the greatest possible certainty that only those men shall be admitted who will reflect honour on our choice, who will carry on our traditions and teachings, and who will pass on to their successors the unimpaired teachings of Freemasonry which we have inherited.

On the answers to these questions depend the answer to the title of this address - "Who will follow in our Train".

Talking to candidates is only part, and a small part, of the influence we have on them. They are going to be influenced in their attitude toward Masonry and towards life by their observations of the Members and officers, particularly the officers of their own Lodge, and more especially the Grand Lodge Officers with whom they come do contact.

They are going to observe whether or not the senior Brethren of the Lodge give serious thought to their Lodge duties such as regular attendance, committee responsibilities, and ritualistic work. They are going to observe how seriously he takes his church duties, his duties as a husband, a father, as a citizen.

The fact that Freemasonry arouses these thoughts is evidence of the leavening influence that it is capable of having on its members. If each member of our order realized the great potentialities in the phrase

"rank entails responsibility" or "noblesse oblige", the great influence of our order for good would be accelerated.

The constant rise in standards of freedom and justice; in spiritual and moral values, in democratic processes of government has always been evident in those civilizations where Freemasonry was allowed to flourish. The reason for this is that Freemasonry is a way of life based on the teachings of the Bible. One of the great purposes of Freemasonry is to interpret the Bible into a practical philosophy of life for its members.

At our sessions last year M.W. Bro. Blackstock, quoted the words of Quentin Reynolds - "If I were a dictator the first book I would burn would be the Bible. I would burn it because I realize that the whole concept of democracy came out of that book".

Brethren, Masonry is known to us as the most democratic institution in the world. There is a personal responsibility on every Mason, on each one of us to so live, to so interpret Masonry to our Brethren and to the world that those who follow in our train shall be respected citizens of a free democratic world.

On the answer to the second question previously raised "Am I so guarding the portals of my own Dodge as to assure with the greatest possible certainty that only those men will be admitted who will reflect honour on our choice", depends the degree of respect and influence that our order shall enjoy. The answer to this question has a very direct bearing on "Who Will Follow In Our Train".

In some jurisdictions, particularly the older ones, the sponsors of an applicant are required to answer, in the affirmative, questions indicating any intimate personal acquaintance with the proposed candidate over a considerable number of years. In newer jurisdictions operating in territories where the population is fluid rather than static this approach is not practical. However the fact that it is not practical is all the more reason for great care being exercised before placing our names on application forms as sponsors. It is all the more reason for careful enquiry on the part of the investigating committee, for taking the necessary time to make enquiries by correspondence even though waiting for replies entails holding up the application until there is no possible doubt as to the character any reputation of the applicant. It is all the more reason for having an unfavourable report brought into the Lodge and having the applicant rejected if that course is indicated, rather than returning the application forms and the fee quietly to the

applicant and allowing the character committee to fail in reporting on the application. Such a course leaves the undesirable seeker after our privileges free to apply to another Lodge and freely state that he has never been rejected by a Masonic Lodge. I have observed a deplorable tendency to allow this unauthorized custom to become more prevalent.

Finally there rests on each member the responsibility to use the black ball where there is any possible doubt.

The report of the committee on Grievances and Appeals at the annual communications of all Grand Lodges, from time to time recommends suspension or expulsion of a member. It is a sad commentary on the care with which our portals are being guarded. It indicates that in some respect we have failed, most likely primarily in the selection of material, and possibly secondly in the instruction and inspiration afforded the members of our Lodge.

In some jurisdictions it is customary to hold sponsors of a candidate responsible for the performance of new members - first as candidates preparing for advancement through the degrees and later as members attending Lodge and participating in committee work or as junior officers. Where this attitude prevails - of holding the sponsor responsible for the Masonic conduct of proteges - there is a noticeable increase in the caution with which applications are sponsored. No sponsor relishes the prospect of being asked in Lodge to explain why a Brother is not answering the signs and summons of the Worshipful Master. There may be fewer applications received, but the members gained do not tend to drift away as is the case where a more casual attitude prevails regarding the non-attendance of members.

A possible solution that lies within the power of every Lodge is to include in the bylaws a provision for suspension of a member for non-attendance, just as I suppose every Lodge has a provision in the bylaws for suspension of a member for non-payment of dues.

In cases of sickness or absence from the area within which the Lodge operates allowances could be made, but to the absent Brother who has permanently moved to a new community the suggestion should be made that a transfer to a conveniently situated Lodge is the desirable course. The provision of reduced annual dues for non-resident members is to be deplored as it encourages retention of membership in a Lodge which the Brother cannot attend. There should be, in my opinion, no reduction for non-resident members, and in fact I believe that a much more healthy provision would be for increased annual

dues for them as an inducement to affiliate in a Lodge where they can attend and so absorb some of the Masonic atmosphere which I have found always prevails at Lodge meetings. He would be in a better position to make a contribution which will assure us that those who follow in our train shall be earnest and sincere men whose philanthropy is not merely a phrase in the ritual but a practical reality.

In all voluntary organizations the responsibility of maintaining the organization and cultivating and developing its influence rests upon a relatively small group of willing officers and members. Such men are to be found in our craft as is evidenced by the growth and spread of Freemasonry throughout the world. Such men are the ones we should be careful to admit when opportunity offers, to the exclusion of those who, in their daily lives, in their attitude towards church, home and state have indicated a lack of the required sense of responsibility., a lack of a sense of mission in this world as a preparation for the next.

In other words, the member in accepting an application, the character committee in investigating the applicant, and the Brethren when balloting should have in mind a positive search for material that will strengthen, support and maintain our institution. They should always remember that Masonry is not a reform school, but an institution designed to make good men better. They should remember that we are at that point determining in a very real way "who shall follow in our train".

There are two commentaries on the programme following the suggested title of this paper. They are "What do our present day Brethren expect from the craft?" and "What will our Brethren of the future expect?".

M.W. Bro. Heckbert, in his paper delivered at our Conference last year entitled "What should be the practical Masonic Design for Individual Masons" gave an account of a personal survey he had made of twenty non-attending members of his own Lodge. I have read again these twenty answers, with the thought in mind "What does or what did this brother expect from the Craft?". As you might expect of an accountant, I endeavoured to classify and tabulate the answers given by them.

Under the heading of "Does he enjoy the meetings", I found that fourteen answers would indicate that they did. Four complained of too much degree work although two of these indicated that they enjoyed the meetings. The remaining four answers were of such a nature that

they did not commit themselves on this point but two of them were attending other related organizations, one stated that he wanted Lodge work and one complained of late nights. This would appear to indicate that at least two thirds of the non-attending Brethren had found what they expected in the fields of friendly association and entertainment - they enjoyed the meetings but were not attending.

I next endeavoured to summarize the reasons given for non-attendance. I found that the answers "neglect", "no excuse", "busy" or "carelessness" accounted for eleven of them and "late nights" for two. Three claimed family responsibilities, study, club discontinued and friends not Masons, respectively. The remaining four were active in other related organizations because they were in office or felt that they were needed there. This to me is a significant group. It is one of the great human characteristics that we all want to feel that we are useful, that we are needed. Is this a significant answer to the question "what do the present day Brethren expect from the Craft?". It could well be that the eleven Brethren who gave no real reason for not attending did not realize that it was because they did not feel that they were needed. In every Lodge there is a group, usually composed of officers, past masters and committee members, who are exemplary in attendance. They are the members who feel that they are needed. Of the eleven members referred to above who had no real reason for not attending nine did promise to try to do better. Was this in response to a feeling that had been aroused in them by the enquiry? Had it given them reason to think that they were missed and were needed?

It requires an earnest, persistent effort on the part of the W. Master and senior officers of a Lodge to endeavour to keep every member busy, to make each man feel that he is needed. Attendance committees can be effective if they are composed of senior members of the Lodge, as indicated by the promises of better attendance received by M.W. Bro. Heckbert.

The next step would appear to be to give each member a real job to do, a reason for feeling that he is needed. One popular avenue of approach to this problem is degree nights when "side benchers" do the work.. Masonic plays are another means of interesting and developing members. Asking members to look after hospital visiting or calling on shut-ins sometimes produces surprising results in that the visitor usually benefits himself as much as he does the brother he calls on.

We learn and develop by doing, and the Master who is successful in keeping the largest possible number of his members busy will be doing

his part toward the realization of the noble object of Freemasonry, the cultivation and development of the human mind, and he will be justifying the claim of our order that it can with propriety be styled a science.

It therefore appears that what the present day Brethren expect from the Craft is that they be given a task in the building of the temple, that they be given a reason, a purpose for their membership, that they be given an opportunity to make a contribution to the great work, and in doing so cultivate and develop their own talents, and grow in their appreciation of spiritual values.

Regarding the second commentary on the programme "What will our Brethren of the future expect", we enter into the field of prophecy when we endeavour to peer into the future. However I believe that we can expect to be held responsible for the maintenance of the traditions and ideals of the Craft which have been handed down to us, to be held in trust for future generations.

We must avoid the possibility of letting members come to look on Freemasonry as a religion. My own observations lead me to believe that the leaders in our Lodges tend to be the leaders in Church work in their communities, which is, of course, in accord with the teaching of our Craft. Annual or more frequent Church parades should be continued and emphasized as they do publicly refute any suggestion that Masonry is taking its members away from their churches. Our Brethren of the future will undoubtedly expect that we shall continue our efforts to make our members conscious of their religious duty and encourage them to support the Church, which has been so influential in bringing our way of life up to the high spiritual, moral and democratic standards we now enjoy. The maintenance and raising of these standards should, in self-interest and in the interests of our Brethren of the future, be our constant conscious aim.

We are all aware that it is unlawful to countenance innovations in the body of Masonry. Our Brethren of the future will expect us to resist the pressures exerted at times to make our Craft more "popular" by converting it into a service club or some other such organization. Service clubs are very worthy organizations and fill a definite need in our communities. They do a great deal of charitable work, they participate in fund raising campaigns for community projects; they sponsor cultural and artistic programmes and many other related ventures. All such activities have the hearty approbation of Freemasonry and there is no reason why the Brethren should not

participate as members of such service clubs. Freemasonry has, however, a distinctive spiritual basis, a mystic origin lost in antiquity, a message and a mission which is not comparable to any other organization; and our Brethren of the future will expect us to maintain these values intact.

Our Brethren of the future will undoubtedly expect that Masonry will maintain itself in a sound financial position in keeping with the importance and dignity of the Craft. There are certain principles of finance which should be observed by all Masonic Lodges. Foremost among these is that current expenditures should always be kept within current income. This means that initiation fees should be considered as the capital investment of the new member in the Lodge, and as such should be deposited in a separate bank account to be used for capital purposes such as erection of a permanent home for the Lodge, establishment of a benevolent fund, or some other such project of a permanent and creative nature in keeping with the teachings of the Craft. To follow such a course would mean that most of our Lodges would find it necessary to raise the annual dues. I believe that we are selling Masonry short by offering bargain rates in initiation fees and annual dues, and that more dignity and respect would accrue to the Craft if the rates were set high enough to enable our Lodges to maintain a level in their benevolent, social and business activities in keeping with the high importance of the order.

Our Brethren of the future will undoubtedly expect that we shall develop buildings and furnishings of such a size and style as will draw favourable attention to the Craft. On the prairies most of our Lodges are quite new, but in spite of this fact many of them have already acquired creditable Masonic Temples which are well furnished. Some are renting premises in commercial buildings and a few are actually renting accommodation from other fraternal societies. This is, in my mind, unworthy of the oldest and largest Fraternal Society in the world and I am sure it is not what our Brethren of the future will expect.

Undoubtedly many of the Brethren present will express ideas which vary from those I have expressed, many will have new thought to bring to the discussion, and that is what we are here for.

To sum up my thinking on this question "Who will follow in our train?", I can think of no better conclusion than the following tribute to Freemasonry, which also commences with a question and has a prophetic theme based on her past and present attribute and those of her members.

What is the Mystery of Freemasonry's hold upon her Brethren? A little close knit fraternity set in a vast sea of humanity, a shroud of mystery for a garment, her lessons veiled in allegory and illustrated by Symbols, our Mother Grand Lodge, in size, a pebble on the seashore; in distance from parts of her Order so isolated that most of her members are initiated, live their 'Masonic lives and die without ever having seen her; cultivating and developing men as mysterious as she; cold, foggy, aloof, indomitable, deep, gentle, kind, lethargic. Brave as lions, hard as nails, stupid as bulls, keen as steel, dumb as fish, eloquent as torrents, and with an imagination so superb, that for them, if they will it there is nothing to stay them. These are the men that, throughout the long corridors of time Freemasonry sends out to the four corners of the earth to live and die as Masons. These are the men who carry her out in their hearth, so wrapped and guarded, that wherever they go, she is.

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